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INTRODUCTION
TO
THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

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TO
THE BHAGAVAD-GITA
BY

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(Indian Renaissance Library Series)

No. 4.

मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्याध्यात्मचेतसा ।

निराशीर्निर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः ॥

Gita, III, 30.

GANESH & Co., MADRAS.

1935

DEDICATED
TO
THE STUDENTS
OF
THE PRESIDENCY COLLEGE
MADRAS

" . . . I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon I turn to the Bhagavad-Gita, and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita."

MAHATMA GANDHI

PREFACE

THIS book is intended primarily for students in college classes. It is the summary of a series of lectures which the writer delivered to the members of the Presidency College Hostel during the short term of 1924-25. The original lectures have been re-arranged and re-written very considerably. The last three sections have now been added. The aim of the book is, frankly, to make the students lead a life of high purpose, accepting the Gita as their guide. Therefore it is not concerned with the sectarian interpretations of the scripture. Nor does it pretend to possess any theological exactitude. It is earnestly hoped that this short and rather informal introduction will supply a long-felt need in the student-world, and serve as a help to those who want to use the Gita as a practical gospel. If this hope is realised, it is proposed to publish, in the same series, a student's edition of the Gita, with the text and English translation and a few explanatory notes on the

difficult verses and the sequence of thought in each chapter.

In preparing this book for the press the writer is very much indebted to his esteemed friends—Professor Kuppuswami Sastriar of the Presidency College and Mr. Rajagopala Aiyangar of the Kumbakonam College—for many valuable suggestions.

<i>The Presidency College Hostel,</i>	}	D. S. SARMA
<i>Triplicane.</i>		
8th August, 1925.		

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE—

I

THE Bhagavad-Gita is an authoritative Hindu Scripture. The Upanishads, the Brahma-Sutras and the Gita form what is called the *Prasthāna-traya* or the threefold authority. They have been commented upon by our great Acharyas and they are the text books common to all schools of religious thought. No system of Hindu thought is considered orthodox unless it is based on them. Therefore, the Gita, though it occurs in an epic, is said to be as much a Revelation as the Veda. In fact, the epic itself has been raised to the rank of a Veda on account of this and similar teachings embedded in it.

The Gita is not only an authoritative Hindu scripture but also one of the world's greatest books. It is read and admired in many civilised countries of the world as well as India. It has

been translated into many important languages, not at the instance of any propagandist missions but because the need was really felt among disinterested scholars. We may, therefore, take a legitimate pride in the Gita as one of the achievements of our race. But pride without knowledge is vulgar. Therefore it behoves every Hindu student to make a systematic study of the scripture and, what is more important, to try to bring its teaching into vital relation with his everyday life. The Gita is after all a simple book. It brings the highest truths home to our minds with an ease which we do not always find in our other scriptures. The Upanishads, no doubt, soar often to higher regions of thought and experience, but they are rather unequal. The Gita on the other hand maintains a uniformly high level. It is also far more suitable to the young student than the Brahma-Sutras which consist of aphorisms that cannot be understood without an elaborate commentary. The Gita is not a string of aphorisms. It is a fairly long religious poem developing its theme in a natural way from within. Moreover, it is addressed not to the hermit living in a forest nor to the advanced student of theology but to the common man—the average citizen who is anxious to know and

do what is right. Therefore, every one of us can attempt to understand and live by it.

The best way for a beginner, who wants to study the Gita, is to go through the bare text several times without any commentary, marking all the passages that appeal to him most and bringing his inner life to bear on them. Once he attempts to do this, he will find that the Gita comes into contact with his spiritual experience at various points and sheds a tender and gracious light on them. Gradually his mind will be illumined, and he will see a wealth of meaning too deep for words in verses which others pass by without a comment. Take for instance this simple verse :

“How may I know thee, O Yogi, by constant meditation? In what and what aspects art thou to be thought of by me, O Blessed One?” (X. 17.)

We have here a sincere and perfect expression of the feeling of a man who is on the threshold of religious life. The question that Arjuna asks is prompted by what is highest in the human spirit. How many of us pass through life without ever feeling the necessity for such a question! But when once we genuinely feel it—what a turning point it is in our lives! And, again, how often in religious life we are

haunted by sceptical misgivings that our beliefs may be false and our prayers vain! The Gita rightly says:

“One man in a thousand perhaps strives for perfection; and, of those who strive, scarcely one knows me in truth.” (VII. 3.)

Let us take another illustration—the passage describing the three kinds of pleasure.

“And now hear from me, O Arjuna, the three kinds of pleasure. That which puts an end to a man’s misery and in which he comes to rejoice by long practice, and that which is like poison at first but like nectar at the end—such a pleasure is said to be *sâttvika*. It springs from a clear soul that knows itself. That pleasure which is like nectar at first but like poison at the end is said to be *râjasa*. It springs from the senses and the objects they meet with. But that pleasure which deludes the soul both in the beginning and in the end is said to be *tâmasa*. It springs from sleep and torpor and error.” (XVIII. 36-39.)

In spite of the quaint terms of an obsolete psychology what a clear expression have we here of the facts of religious life! The life of the senses is always alluring at first and the life of the spirit always hard and exacting. But even young men know that the pleasures of the senses pall

upon them very soon and fail to satisfy the spirit. On the other hand the joy of religious life abides for ever. Its happiness increases. As the author of the Narada-Sutras puts it, it makes a man perfect, deathless and satisfied. But even the life of the senses is better than the life of torpor and sleep. The world of temptation and strife keeps us at least at the human level. When we cannot dare and sin we slide back to the brute.

Let us take one more instance—the passage at the beginning of the fifteenth chapter.

“The world-tree with roots above and branches below is said to be eternal. Its leaves are the Vedas and therefore he who knows it knows the Vedas. Its branches spread above and below, and are nourished by the *gunas*. Its buds are the objects of the senses; and its roots grow downwards giving rise to actions in the world of men. Its form as such is not here perceived, nor its end, nor its origin, nor its basis. Cut down this firm-rooted tree with the strong sword of detachment, and seek that place from which a man never returns, and say ‘I take refuge in the Primal Purusha from whom streams forth this eternal activity.’” (XV. 1-4.)

What a profound human experience have we here! The world is too much with us. It is

ever with us. It often stands between us and God. With its manifold branches and roots it stands in the way of our spiritual life. We are aware of that fact every time we attempt to pray. We know that the world has sprung from God. We know that its attractions rouse us to action. And we also know that, until we have resisted it with the strength of our souls, we have not "entered on the paths". But more we do not know. Theorise as we may, life must remain in the last resort a mystery. It is not given to us to know exactly how it arose and what is its end. Systems of philosophy come and go. Science constantly makes and breaks its apparatus. Man ever speculates. The secret, however, remains a secret. We can never know all. But what we know is enough for our purpose. We know we are higher than the things of the world. We feel we are the masters here. Let a man begin to act on the truth that he is greater than the world of pleasures and pains, and he will soon find himself. And, finding himself, he will find God—the source of all mystery. So spiritual life is the only road to salvation.

There are hundreds of such passages in the Gita which will startle us with new suggestions when we begin to apply them to our own inner

life. As we grow old in years we see a wider and wider application of the sacred words. In fact the more we know of human life and the more we taste of its sweets and bitters the better we shall understand the meaning of this great poem. One can no doubt read it through in a couple of hours. But it will take a lifetime to understand all that it implies. We may even say that, until we have made the Gita the staff of our lives, it will not begin to yield its real meaning. Therefore every student should read the book for himself and try, in the first place, to live by it. After he has exhausted his own spiritual experience in interpreting it in terms of modern life, he should turn to the great commentaries which will help him to understand many a difficult verse and to trace the sequence of thought in each chapter. Meanwhile, when he comes across puzzling passages, especially those in which the author makes use of the scientific theories current in his time, he will do well to suspend his judgment and not run to hasty or irreverent conclusions.

II

A study of the Bhagavad-Gita will satisfy not only our individual needs but also the needs

of our age. For the age that gave birth to this scripture, as we have it now, was in many respects similar to ours. It had the same problems, the same difficulties and the same need for unity and reconstruction. The Epic age was an age of expansion when Brahmanism became Hinduism. By the Epic age we mean that period in our history when the Ramayana and the Mahabharata including the Gita took their final shape. It is now admitted that the nucleus of the Gita and of the two epics was in existence long before this period. But it was the Hindu Revival which followed the decline of the Mauryan empire that gave these books their present didactic form and setting. The special problem of India then was, as it is still to-day, how to bring about a unity in a vast mass of heterogeneous population containing various races with different levels of culture. The Upanishads had, no doubt, proclaimed a universal religion based on the inherent divinity of man. But the age that followed that great era of religious intuition was one of little minds. The period of the early Sutras was one of priests like the age of the Brahmanas which had followed the period of the Vedic hymns. Every age of prophets and poets is immediately succeeded by one of priests and pundits. Every

age of expansion is followed by one of conservation. The Brahmin priests of the Sutra period never attempted to translate the Upanishadic ideals into the realities of life. By their Grihya Sutras and Dharma Sutras they no doubt organised their own class and prescribed to themselves a rigorous discipline for all stages of life. But they still worshipped the old gods and clung to the old, narrow conception of *dharma*, as if the seers of the Upanishads had never lived and taught. The rigour of the old sacrificial religion was in no way lessened, and the parochial character of the Brahminical ethics was still maintained. Morality was conditioned by caste, and communalism was the keynote of the scheme of salvation. Except for the advance in the law of Karma and the recognition of the sovereign virtue of the new Atma-Vidya, the religion of the early Sutras was in no way different from that of the pre-Upanishadic period. The Brahmins of the age never attempted to remould their institutions in the light of the new universal religion. It was, of course, a stupendous task. After twenty-five centuries it still remains undone. Meanwhile what the Brahmin priests never attempted to do Buddha attempted and succeeded for a time. That great statesman and teacher widened the

concept of *dharma*, worked out a scheme of life in accordance with the speculations of the age of the Upanishads, and founded a religion which, in theory at least, recognised no racial or class distinctions. Though he formally repudiated the authority of the Vedic tradition, he was in some respects far more faithful to it in spirit than those who accepted it and made a fetish of its letter. The new religion cleared the ground and made such large political institutions as the Mauryan Empire possible. But it levelled down too much, and in a few generations the superstitions of the lower strata choked the ethical idealism of the higher classes in the Buddhist fold. When the moral severity of the early Bhikkus gave place to fantastic beliefs, the negations of Buddhism became all the more painful. The best minds of the country were therefore forced to oppose the further spread of that religion. Buddha's method was all right for a country with a fairly homogeneous population. As a matter of fact his religion succeeded wonderfully in some foreign countries where there was such a population. It is still a living faith there. As far as India was concerned, it is a great pity that Buddha's ideals were too much in advance of his time. His short cut proved the longer way.

Moreover the great emphasis laid by Buddha on monastic life robbed the society of its most efficient members. No wonder, therefore, that the Hindu thinkers looked upon Buddhism as an anti-social force as well as a heresy. For, according to its scheme of life, domestic virtues were at a discount and many necessary steps in the spiritual growth of man were skipped. Renunciation and contemplation were preferred to action, and the principle of *Sanyasa* was believed to be of universal validity.

The reaction came at last during the so-called Epic Age. Both the religions had to set their houses in order. The Brahmins learned a lesson from the Buddhist Sangha. They saw the mistake they had committed in not carrying the masses with them. They had made their knowledge a secret doctrine and not a rule of life. If the peculiar circumstances of the country rendered an immediate levelling of all social distinctions undesirable, the next best thing they should have done was to begin the work of levelling up. As they had failed to do this, they had the humiliation of seeing what they regarded as heresy become the religion of the paramount state. That state was now gone and there was a chance for them to recover the lost ground. The Hindu Renaissance that

followed the decline of the Mauryan Empire is best studied in the later recensions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These ancient sagas which the people loved were made the instruments of a great religious revival. The old ballads were rewritten, supplemented, and overlaid with didactic matter till they became the Vedas of the multitude. The teaching of the Upanishads was brought home to the understanding of the common man through the ideal characters and the imaginary dialogues in the Epics. Thus, at last, the gates of the temple were thrown open to all castes and classes. The knowledge which had remained the exclusive possession of a small sect was now made available for all. In theory the old restriction was still retained. But it was meaningless when, in practice, every Vedantic truth was given out in these popular encyclopædias of Hinduism.

At the same time the Hindu scheme of life which had originated in the period of the early Sutras was now definitely fixed and widely taught. The nation-builders of the Epic age clearly enunciated the *purushārthas* or the ends of human life somewhat on the lines of the ashramas prescribed for the Dwijas. They laid down that the purpose of life is fourfold—*dharma, artha, kâma, and mōksha*. The first

three of these constitute the path of *pravritti* and have to be gained in domestic life. A man has to be a member of society and discharge his duties as a householder and citizen by acquiring wealth and enjoying it within the limits prescribed by dharma or righteousness. And, after his period of active life, he should by degrees give up his hold on possessions and follow the path of *nivritti*. The final stage of life, for which his whole career has been a preparation, is one of complete surrender and hence of liberation or moksha. This ideal of a full life which takes into account all the facts of human nature doing no violence either to the flesh or the spirit, and which was as much a corrective to the monastic Buddhism of those times as it is to the materialistic civilisation of to-day, was proclaimed in a thousand different ways in all the literature of the Hindu Renaissance—the two Epics, the Code of Manu and the subsequent Puranas.

In accordance with this scheme, domestic virtues were glorified, and a philosophy of action was developed. Ideal types of character representing all stages of life were clothed in epic grandeur and set before the nation. We have not only the ideal hermit or monk but also the ideal king, the chaste wife, the loyal brother,

the disciplined student, the orthodox householder and the faithful servant. It is difficult to estimate the educative influence of such concrete examples as Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Dharmaraja, and Bhishma on the national mind. They have moulded the Hindu society as the Homeric characters moulded the Hellenic society. The latter has been wiped out but the Hindu social structure, with all its sins, still remains. Thus the abstract truths of the Upanishads became vital forces holding together a great civilisation, only when they were incarnated in the epic types. The Purusharthas would have remained only vague formulas if they had not been exemplified by the innumerable miniature lives of the saints in the Epics and the Puranas. True, many of these stories are rather wild and fantastic. But, behind all their extravagant imagery, one can see the single, unalterable, and perfect scheme of life which has sustained the Hindu society throughout its chequered history.

When religion was thus brought home to the masses it underwent some inevitable changes. A highly metaphysical or mystical religion could only be for the few. The Vedantic Absolute which could be described only by "not this, not that," and "from which the speech of man

turns away together with the mind not having attained it" is not for the multitude. On the other hand, if it was to become popular an appeal had to be made to the hearts and imaginations of men. Therefore the cold metaphysic was kept in the background and the warm theistic elements in the Upanishads were developed to the fullest extent and emphasis was laid on the personality of God. In the place of the impersonal Absolute we have now an Ishwara—a Divine Person who has created all beings and whom we have to love and fear. He is the creator, protector and destroyer. If the mind of man cannot grasp at once all the three aspects let it concentrate itself on one at a time. Thus arose in this period the important doctrine of the Hindu Trinity or Trimurti. The One Ishwara was viewed from three different points of view. And those gods of the Vedic pantheon who best exemplified these several aspects of God were naturally brought into prominence for purposes of worship and meditation. When one and the same aspect was exemplified by two or three gods, they were identified with one another. As a result of this process of syncretism we have Brahma, the creator, out of the older Hiranyagarbha, Prajapati and Brahman; Vishnu, the protector,

out of Narayana, Vasudeva and Vishnu ; and Siva, the destroyer, out of Rudra, Pasupati and Siva. The synthesis is done in a frank and open manner, for Hinduism freely acknowledges that the multiplicity of gods is only a concession to human weakness. *Ekam sad viprá bahudhā vadanti.*

But the most noteworthy development in the popularisation of religion in the Epic Age is the doctrine of Divine Incarnation. It is but a step from the doctrine of Divine Trinity. In the Upanishads the Absolute was described as a Being not only transcendental but also immanent. Shandilya says in the Chandogya Upanishad :

" He is my soul within my heart—smaller than a grain of rice or of barley or a mustard seed or grain of millet or even millet rice. He is my soul within my heart—greater than the sky, greater than the heavens and greater than all the worlds."

God is both *antaryāmin* and *paramātmān*. He is the string, as the Gita poetically puts it, that holds together the pearls of creation. All created things are only His partial manifestations. The inanimate objects and the inferior beings represent His lower nature and man represents His higher nature. Krishna says :

“Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, will and consciousness—such is the eightfold division of my nature. But this is my lower nature. My other and higher nature—know that to be the element of self-consciousness by which this universe is upheld.” (VII. 4, 5.)

The divinity in man becomes most resplendent when he identifies himself with the law of righteousness and carries out the will of God. Great heroes, whose lives or teachings have become a permanent spiritual possession to posterity, are therefore to be reckoned as gods on earth. It is Vishnu, the Protector, himself that, out of his compassion for mankind, comes down from time to time in the form of such god-like men. And when it is remembered that there have been a number of such saviours—historical, legendary or mythical—a graded series of incarnations is postulated. Thus the feeling for the concrete in religion led not only to the development of Theism but also to the doctrines of Trimurti and Avatars. The further steps in the same process were temples, images, holy places and pilgrim centres—in a word, all the paraphernalia of a popular religion with which we are well acquainted. There was a parallel development in Buddhism also, known as

Mahayana, but it came much later—at least after two centuries.

This religious expansion by which Brahmanism became Hinduism during the Epic age was partly the result of a new political outlook. In the literature of the preceding ages it is only the kingdoms between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas that figure prominently, and the tribes beyond these barriers are considered more or less beyond the pale of civilisation. In other words, we fail to see an all-India outlook. But after the Mauryan Empire and the missions of Asoka, we have not only an all-India outlook but also the influence of foreign civilisations on our own. For the first time in our history it is felt that India, in spite of all complexities of races, creeds and kingdoms, is really one. This fundamental unity is enforced in several passages in the Mahabharata, and its recognition is one of the great landmarks of this period. The heroes of the great Epic are significantly represented as having under their sway the whole of India. Further both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mention various foreign nations like the Greeks, the Scythians and the Parthians. The invasions of Alexander and the establishment of Hellenic kingdoms on the frontiers of India had already brought together

the cultures of two distinguished branches of the Indo-Germanic family.

Thus, in its clash of cultures, its great mental expansion, its schemes of evangelisation, its concern for the masses, its need for reconstruction, its search for unity, its pride in the past and its hopes for the future—the so-called Epic age was not unlike our own. In a word, it was also a period of Renaissance. It was a prelude to the glories of the Gupta Empire.¹ The appeal was in those days made to young Brahmins and young Kshatriyas. At every step they were put on their mettle and made to realise that on their purity, discipline and heroism depended the entire Hindu Society. That is the meaning of all the panegyrics upon those two castes that we find in the Epics. It is a mistake to say that such passages were due to the machinations of priestcraft. One can understand the term priestcraft being applied to the age of the Brahmanas. For in that age elaborate sacrifices, in which the priest was everything, were a conspicuous feature of religious life. But the Epic age, as we have pointed out, was an age, not of priests, but of prophets and statesmen and nation-builders. The latter saw the advantage of inspiring a

¹ See the Chart of the Periods of Indian Culture—the first number in this series.

small class with high ideals of purity and public service.

The students in our colleges stand to-day in the place of that class. No matter to what caste or community they belong, they form the flower of our nation. They are the new Brahmins and the new Kshatriyas. On them will depend the future of our civilisation. In modern times it is the University men that form the brains of a country. They are the leaders of thought; they man the services; they form the officers in the army and the navy; they are the editors of newspapers; and they constitute the clergy. Though at present in India, unfortunately, there are not so many openings for the University men, it is no exaggeration to say that a mighty task of social and religious reconstruction is awaiting them all. If they want to equip themselves properly for that task, they should read the literature of the Epic age with imagination and insight, and derive inspiration from the great nation-builders of that time. At the head of these stands the anonymous author of the Gita, whom tradition calls Vyasa. In him they will find not only a sage endowed with inexhaustible spiritual wealth but also a wise and conservative reformer who understands the genius

of his race and the needs of his country. If they accept him as their spiritual guide and understand the gospel he preaches in all its bearings on the problems of to-day, they will certainly be able to save "this land of tears and sorrow" as well as themselves. Why, we may even say—though in our present sinful state the statement may provoke the laughter of the gods—that they will also be able to give a message to the world. For, as long as there is militarism or competitive industrialism in the world, as long as there is compulsion or claim to infallibility in religion, and as long as the conquest of the forces of nature is considered more important than the conquest of the passions of the mind, Hinduism will have a gospel to preach and an ideal to point to. But this is a matter for the future generations of Hindus. It is enough for the present generation if they translate the lessons of the Gita into their daily lives, build up character, and set their house in order.

III

It is well known that the Gita is an episode in the national Epic—the Mahabharata. Let us recall to our minds the exact circumstances.

The armed hosts meet on the field of Kurukshetra and the historic battle is about to begin. At this dramatic moment comes the Gita dialogue. But this is not the only interruption in the narrative. There are at least two other incidents. We are told that on that fateful morning, when the Kaurava army stood facing the Pandava army, Dharmaraja came forward, looked at the impenetrable *vyûha* formed by Bhishma and became pale with fear. He says to Arjuna, "O Dhananjaya, how shall we be able to fight with Duryodhana's army when our grandfather commands it? Immovable and impenetrable is the *vyûha* formed by Bhishma according to the rules of the Shastras. How can victory be ours in the face of such an army? O Arjuna, I am doubtful of success." But Arjuna encourages his brother by quoting an ancient verse which is characteristically Hindu in spirit :

"They that are desirous of victory do not conquer so much by might and prowess as by truth, compassion, piety and virtue. . . . Victory is certain to be where righteousness is."

"Therefore," continues Arjuna, "we are certain of victory in this battle, O king. Moreover, according to Narada, victory is certain to be where Krishna is. Victory is one of His

attributes; so also is humility. Victory always follows Him. His glory is endless. Amidst hosts of enemies He remains unscathed. He is the eternal Purusha. So victory is certain to be where Krishna is." "Therefore" concludes Arjuna, "I do not see any reason for sorrow. You have the Lord of the universe and of the gods to wish you success."

Thereupon Dharmaraja takes heart and retires to his place in the army. Then ensues a short conversation between Krishna and Arjuna. The former advises his friend before he begins the battle to purify himself and pray to Durga for success. Arjuna accordingly descends from his chariot and chants a hymn in praise of the goddess. The Goddess, pleased with his devotion, appears before him. In the presence of Krishna, she blesses Arjuna saying, "O son of Pandu, you will vanquish your enemy in no time. You have Narayana himself to help you." After the disappearance of the goddess, Arjuna again mounts his chariot, and both the hero and his charioteer blow their conches. It is immediately after this incident that we have the Bhagavad-Gita episode. While the heroes are blowing their conches and the clash of weapons is about to begin, Arjuna raises his famous bow, but seeing in front of him his

teachers, friends and kinsmen whom he has to kill, he is overcome with pity. He drops his bow with the arrow in it and refuses to fight. Thereupon Krishna discusses the whole moral question with him as represented in the Gita, meets his objections and evidently convinces him at last that it is his duty to fight. For at the end of the long discourse Arjuna once more takes his bow in his hand and proceeds to fight.

But the battle does not immediately begin. There is one more interruption. Arjuna, to his surprise, now sees Dharmaraja putting off his armour and weapons, and advancing towards the enemy. Not only Arjuna but also the other brothers are taken aback. They leave their chariots and run after their elder brother, puzzled at his strange procedure. Dharmaraja now goes straight to his grandfather Bhishma who is the commander of the Kaurava troops. He falls at his feet and says, "We are going to fight with you, O invincible warrior! Grant us your permission and give us your blessings." Bhishma willingly grants him permission and gives him his blessing. He says that he himself is fighting on the other side, not because it is the righteous side, but because he is bound to the Kurus by wealth. Then Dharmaraja goes

to Drona, to Kripa, and to Shalya in succession ; and the same formulas are repeated. All these elders feel that the Pandava cause is a righteous cause, but as true soldiers they have to be loyal to the Kaurava king in whose pay they have been all their lives. They therefore bless Dharmaraja and grant him permission to fight against them, and, if necessary, to kill them. Meanwhile Krishna goes to Karna and tries to induce him to desert the Kaurava army because it is commanded by his personal enemy—Bhishma. He advises him to fight on the Pandava side at least till Bhishma's death. But Karna refuses to desert his master. "O Kesava," he says, "I will not do anything which is disagreeable to Duryodhana. I am ever devoted to him. Know that my life has been dedicated to him." Then the five brothers and Krishna go back to their positions.

The battle does not yet begin. There is one more pause. Dharmaraja has still some scruples. He now loudly proclaims to the enemy "Even now he who will choose to fight on our side will be considered as our ally." Only one man takes advantage of this offer. Yuyutsu, one of the Kaurava brothers, comes over to the side of the Pandavas. The poet tells us that all the kings assembled on the field of battle admired

the friendship, compassion and kindness displayed by the Pandavas towards their kinsmen. "Eulogistic hymns in praise of those illustrious men were chanted. The minds and hearts of all were attracted towards them. Both the Aryans and Non-Aryans who saw or heard of this conduct of the Pandavas wept, and their voices were choked with tears." Then the battle begins.

IV

The details given in the last section will enable us to understand the significance of the form in which the teaching of the Gita is cast. It is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna at a very dramatic moment in the great war. One of the interlocutors is identified with the Supreme Deity—Narayana, and the teaching is thus made authoritative. But it must be admitted that this identification, which is the fundamental hypothesis of the Mahabharata, is not always kept in view in the great Epic. The latter is the work of several hands during several ages. It is as much a *samhita* or collection as the Rig Veda or the Upanishads. Hence its bewildering complexity. It is often compared to a tropical forest where there are gigantic

trees waving their arms in the sky over the thick, impenetrable underwood below. But if one has the time and the patience to traverse the entire region one can grasp the principle of unity. That principle seems to lie not so much in the feud between two noble houses as in the conception of the Avatar. For a fight between two allied tribes, which took place in the remote Vedic period, was magnified by tradition into an event of tremendous importance in which the national imagination saw an ethical and religious significance. Such a great war involving the fate of so many peoples could not have been fought without the intervention of God. Hence the idea which ruled the later recensions of the Epic was that the latter described a colossal fight between the forces of good and the forces of evil, in which the former came out victorious with the help of God in human form. Accordingly, as we have seen, there is always the insistence on the righteousness of the Pandava cause, the characterisation of the war as a *dharmayuddha*, and the identification of Krishna with the Supreme Deity. But as several hands worked at the picture we have no consistent work of art. Different ethical levels are reached in the delineation of the Avatar. It is only in the

Bhagavad-Gita that this master conception, which is fitfully present throughout the Epic and which gives the whole bewildering mass its unity, is fully realised and justified. Had it not been for the author of the Gita, the conception of the Avatar would not have been the ideal of power that it has been. It is hardly necessary to say that this conception in some form or other has dominated the religious thought of almost all races. Avatar, Bodhi-sattva, Messiah, Prophet, Saviour—these are only different names for a single conception. The ideal person thus indicated is either an exemplary man of action or a superhuman religious teacher. The hero of the Ramayana is an example of the former, and the founder of Buddhism is an example of the latter. The Ramayana attempts a single task—that of representing the Avatar as a man of action, and therefore it is more of an artistic success than the Mahabharata which attempts the more ambitious task of uniting the two ideals. For Krishna the central figure in the Mahabharata, the man who holds all the strings of action, was conceived to be both a man of action and a religious teacher. Probably we have here a confluence of two streams of tradition—one descending from Krishna, the disciple of

Ghora, the teacher mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad, and the other from Krishna, the founder of Dvaraka. Whatever that may be, the artists who wrought at the figure of the Avatar in the Mahabharata undertook too great a task and were only partially successful. Either the historical matter was too stubborn for them, or they could not rise to the ethical heights necessary for the realisation of such a grand conception. What else can we infer when in one page we are told that Krishna is the God of gods, and in the next he is described as having lower standards of conduct than such purely human figures as Dharmaraja? For instance, in the incidents of the Epic that we have detailed above, we clearly see three different figures of Krishna at three different levels. We have Krishna asking Arjuna to pray to Durga, we have Krishna standing as Bhagavan Himself, and we have Krishna enticing Karna in vain to desert the Kaurava side. It is difficult to believe, in spite of the resemblances of style and language, that three such different portraits are by the same hand. One is rather reminded of the figures of Buddha in the Ajanta frescoes or the Amaravati sculptures. These masterpieces of art, like the Mahabharata, are not by a single hand. Nor do they belong to a

single age. The anonymous artists of different epochs, working on a common tradition and with the same hieratic purpose, have interpreted the communal ideas of their time in the best way they could. So that in one place we have a Buddha with delicate features highly spiritual and with a look of infinite compassion. But in another place we have a Buddha with pretty features and rounded limbs suggestive rather of earthly beauty like the Greek statues. The figures only reveal the mind of the age and the skill or the want of skill of the artists. They do not affect the character or the teaching of the Blessed One. So is it with the portraiture of Krishna in the Mahabharata. In the aspect of a religious teacher its success is unique, thanks to the author of the Bhagavad-Gita. In the aspect of an ideal man of action, it does not reach the same high level. But when once the Avatarhood was vindicated by the teaching of the Gita, the other parts of the Epic also became acceptable to the community. For, by a slight confusion in thought, the popular mind interpreted the Upanishadic conception of the Supreme Deity transcending moral categories and extending beyond good and evil, to mean a Divine Person taking part in evil as well as good with perfect freedom.

To the author of the Bhagavad-Gita, therefore, Krishna is the supreme religious teacher, the Avatar of Narayana who has come down to re-establish the eternal dharma. His conception of the Avatarhood is expressed in two well-known verses :

“Whenever, O Arjuna, there is decline of righteousness and rise of wickedness, I incarnate myself.

“For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.”

(IV. 7, 8.)

Therefore the highest Vedantic teaching which is calculated to purify the religious thought and practice of his time is appropriately given by the author the form of a dialogue in which Narayana-Krishna is the chief interlocutor. The dialogue was a recognised literary form, through which religious teaching was conveyed in ancient times. It is frequently used in the Upanishads and the Buddhist scriptures. The device of the story of the Mahabharata itself is that of a dialogue within a dialogue. In the Shanti Parva of the Epic we have long and interminable dialogues between Bhishma and Dharmaraja on Hindu philosophy, ethics and sociology. And the characters in

such dialogues are sometimes historical person-ages like Janaka and Yajnavalkya, and sometimes purely mythical ones like Indra and Narada. Even the God of gods is introduced in such works as a character. So the author is following a well-known literary tradition when he chooses the dialogue form for his teaching and makes Arjuna and Krishna, who are frequently described in the Epic as Nara and Narayana, the interlocutors. He clearly intends his Gita to be a dialogue between God and man on some of the most momentous problems of life.

His originality, however, consists in his choosing an intensely dramatic moment to deliver his message. His purpose is to teach the common man a well-balanced philosophy of full and active life. Therefore he has most appropriately chosen the moment of a great action—a critical moment in an epoch-making war, as the national imagination conceived it. He has thereby placed his teaching at the very focus of the great Epic—the point towards which the actions of all the characters tend and from which their subsequent fates diverge. On the choice of Arjuna hung the destinies of nations. If he had persisted in his resolution there would have been an end of the war, and

India would have had a different history. Evil would have secured a triumph. But the calamity was averted. For God fulfilled Himself through the teaching of Krishna. Thus, inherent in the story as it came to the author's hands, there was a thorough vindication of his philosophy of action.

V

But, admirably as the dramatic device of the Gita serves the author's purpose, it has its own disadvantages. First of all, there seems to be in the moment chosen for the teaching an implication that there is a divine sanction for the violence of war. Within the last two or three years the Gita has often been quoted, especially by the anarchists, as contradicting Mahatma Gandhi's message of non-violence. To make the Gita advocate war is thoroughly to misunderstand the import of the scripture. It is no doubt true that the author, who lived some centuries before the Christian era, could not have contemplated the abolition of war. How could he have done that when, even in the twentieth century, mankind still looks upon war as a legitimate weapon and resorts to it with even fewer moral restrictions?

Non-violence among nations, if it is made possible by international courts of arbitration, is undoubtedly as superior to war as an honourable war, described in the literature of chivalry, is superior to the modern massacres with poison gases, secret mines, and aerial bombs. When the enlightened conscience of humanity comes to look upon war as a horrid business and perfects a machinery by which it is made impossible, it will disappear like suttee and slavery. And no misreading of the scriptures can stay the progress of man. If we infer that there is divine sanction for the violence of war in the Gita, we may with equal reason infer that there is divine sanction for animal sacrifices, because the Vedas glorify *yajna*; or that there is divine sanction for meat-eating, because our great Avatars were no vegetarians. The aim of all the scriptures of the world is to lift man from the animal plane by revealing to him the paths of ascent to a higher and higher perfection. But their teaching comes to us covered with the husk of the times, and it is the task of the wise man to separate the husk from the kernel. Half the degradations that flourish under the name of religion are due to our frequent inability to separate what is permanent from what is temporary in our scriptures.

The scriptures are a progressive revelation. The spirit never ceases to grow. For God is not dead. He lives for ever and manifests Himself in the lives of the saints. So, as we rise in the scale of His thoughts, we discover higher and higher laws. And when the higher law is revealed the lower one is ignored. For instance, there is no doubt that vegetarianism is a higher law of life than meat-eating, as meat-eating itself is a higher law than cannibalism. But even vegetarianism is not the highest law, for it still involves injury to life. Therefore the religious imagination of India often represents the ideal sage as a man living on air. It is true that in the conditions of this world life can subsist only on life. But that need not prevent us from making progress from the lower to the higher law. Similarly, in the matter of sex relations there is surely progress from promiscuity, which characterises savage life, to the law of marriage which characterises civilised life, and thence to the law of chastity which characterises sainthood. Similarly, again, in the matter of worship there is progress from the idolatry of the ignorant man to the theism of the cultured man, and thence to the monism of the seer. It is one of the characteristic features of Hinduism that it does not lay

down a single law for all. It does not require all its adherents to be either monists or celibates or even vegetarians. But it does point out the goal, and prescribe a graded discipline for reaching it. Therefore when a Hindu is not able to live up to the higher ideal he confesses his weakness and says he has not the *adhikâra* for it, but never tries to abrogate the ideal itself. Similarly, if a nation feels that it cannot "go dry" or become vegetarian, it is better it confesses its weakness without trying to misinterpret its scriptures in its own defence. So also, if a community feels that in the present state of the world it cannot live up to the ideal of non-violence, it is better to say so than to make the Gita a gospel of violence. For in the Gita the violence of war is only a peg on which the author hangs his religious teaching. In fact, after the first chapter we hear very little about the din of war or the contending armies. The battle-field is nothing more than a dramatic device.

Secondly, the device of the Gita is likely to lead to a misapprehension of the entire teaching of the gospel, if the reader fails to regard Arjuna in the light in which the author regards him. In the introductory chapter Arjuna appears as one who is smitten in conscience at the prospect

of having to slay so many of his kinsmen, teachers and elders, and “wade through slaughter to a throne”. It does not seem to be a question of cowardice on the part of the warrior. A moment before, he had encouraged his elder brother, Dharmaraja, who was panic-stricken. He is not frightened by the odds; nor does he entertain for a moment any doubts regarding the issue of the battle. What unnerves him is apparently the moral question. He puts it very clearly. He says his mind is confused with regard to duty—*dharma sammûdha chetâh*. He regards it as a great sin—*mahat pâpam*—to slay so many of his kinsmen, greedy and wicked as they are, for the selfish purpose of regaining his kingdom. There may be an excuse for his deluded kinsmen on the other side, for they know no better. But what excuse can there be for him and his brothers who claim to be superior men, and who can clearly see the disastrous consequences of a great civil war?

“Though these men, whose understanding has been overpowered by greed, see no evil in the destruction of families, no crime in hostility to friends, why should we not turn away from such a sin, O Krishna, we—who clearly see the evil in the destruction of families?” (I. 38, 39.)

Therefore he nobly suggests that he and his brothers might retire from the scene of battle and live as beggars rather than kill their kinsmen and come into their own. Even dominion over the gods in heaven could not assuage Arjuna's grief if he took part in this fight. It seems to follow, then, from the introductory verses in the Gita, that Arjuna has conscientious scruples about taking part in a civil war with the selfish object of regaining his kingdom. He is prepared to renounce his claims and sacrifice his ambitions. But what is his position at the end? He listens to the advice of his friend and consents to fight. The memorable dialogue closes with the words:

“My delusion is gone. I have come to myself through your grace, O Krishna. I am firm, my doubts are past. I will act on your word.” (XVIII. 73.)

One might plausibly conclude, therefore, that Arjuna's fine feelings have been crushed and violence has been done to his higher nature. But against such a conclusion it is generally argued that Arjuna was taught that, as a Kshatriya, it was his duty to fight and that he should discharge that duty, regardless of consequences. The burden of the Bhagavad-Gita is therefore considered to be

that a man should do his duty and not care for the results. The poem is supposed to teach the doctrine of *Nishkâma Karma*.

Now, the question is this. When Arjuna has such conscientious scruples as he is described to have in the first chapter, when his whole moral being rebels against the hideous action he is called upon to do, does the Gita teach that he should smother his higher self by casuistical arguments that it is his duty as a soldier to kill, and not mind the consequences; or argue in a more subtle way that, when he is killing his kinsmen, he is not the doer but the God in him or perhaps Prakriti with its inevitable gunas? Frankly, if the Gita teaches anything of this kind it can have no claim to the name of scripture. But, as a matter of fact, the whole trend of its teaching is against such a pusillanimous and inhuman conclusion. On the other hand the very essence of the Gita is that a man should cultivate his higher self by learning to live in God and recognising His presence in all beings, and slowly and painfully approximating to the standard of perfection revealed to his purified spirit.

The dilemma which is indicated above, and which confronts every earnest student of the Gita is only due to the complexity of the

dramatic device employed. We surely misunderstand the author's purpose if we regard Arjuna, as he appears at first sight, merely as one who would rather sacrifice his own gain than shed the blood of those whom he loved dearly. The author evidently wants us to look upon him in another light. In the didactic Epic, of which the Gita is a part, the great war is viewed as a *dharma-yuddha*, and the field on which it was fought as a *dharma-kshetra*. The ultimate purpose of the war is the enthronement of *dharma* embodied in Dharma-raja and the defeat of evil embodied in Duryodhana. And to direct the action, Ishvara who is described as *Shâsvata-dharma-gôptâ* is supposed to have come down as an Avatar in the person of Krishna. The hero of the Epic, Arjuna, is the chosen instrument of Divine Justice. He has long been consecrated to this task. His whole life has been a preparation for it. Now when the critical moment comes he falters. He is like a judge who shrinks from pronouncing the capital punishment on his own son, who has been proved to be guilty of murder. He is swayed by personal feelings and hesitates to obey the stern call of duty. Instead of looking upon himself as the chosen instrument of Divine Justice and executing its awful decree in a

humble and selfless manner, he grows sentimental and prates of his own feelings. He has not the courage to say, like the hero in the tragedy,

“It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul ;
Let me not name it to you, you chaste
stars !

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O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword ! One more, one
more.

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill
thee,

And love thee after. One more, and this
the last :

So sweet was ne’er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears ; this sorrow’s
heavenly,

It strikes where it doth love.”

Arjuna fails to become the instrument of Divine Justice. He fails at the critical moment to perceive the implied divine command—*nimitta mātram bhava, Savyasāchin*. He has physical courage, no doubt. But he has no moral courage. He cannot identify himself with the truth that he saw and make it prevail in

scorn of consequences. He knows that justice requires that he should fight on the righteous side, and overthrow evil so shamelessly triumphant in the land. But his weak sentimentality tries "to persuade justice to break her sword". He begins to view the whole question from a narrow and personal standpoint.

It is certain that the author of the Gita wants us to regard Arjuna in this light. If so, why does the misunderstanding referred to above arise? It arises partly from the fact that Arjuna has something to gain by his becoming the instrument of the will of God. In the parallel case we have given, the judge has nothing to gain by pronouncing the death sentence on his own son. On the other hand, by administering Divine Justice, his own life is blasted. So at the critical moment if he is overcome with pity and fails to do his duty, we clearly perceive how he falls short of heroism. But, in the case of Arjuna, the prospect of his gaining a kingdom by his action makes the situation more complex and, of course, more true to life. His resolution that he would rather forego his gain than do violence to his dearly cherished affections, clouds the whole issue to the casual reader as well as to

Arjuna himself. The latter, instead of appearing in his true colours as one who falls short of heroism, actually poses in his self-righteousness as the exponent of a type of heroism even superior to that of his class. We surely misunderstand the situation if we take Arjuna's words at their face-value. But his charioteer, the Divine Searcher of hearts, knows better. He is not baffled by the objections trotted out by Arjuna. He quietly snubs his friend's self-righteousness at the outset by saying ironically "You speak words of wisdom," and proceeds to lay bare the real situation.

Let us therefore understand aright the setting of the characters in the Gita. Let us not read into the device employed by the author meanings which he never intended it to bear. From the accident that Arjuna is willing to forego his kingdom we should not infer that he is a self-denying hero or a conscientious objector. And from the accident that the teaching of the Gita is hung on a historical war, we are not justified in arguing that it advocates war. The Gita neither advocates war nor condemns it. It is more concerned with the general question how a man should view his duty as a part of the will of God and discharge it selflessly and hence

fearlessly. It is more concerned with the battle of man than with the battles of men.

VI

We have so far considered the age that gave birth to the Gita, the context in which it occurs, the form in which it is cast, and the characters which it employs. Having thus traversed these outer courts of the temple we now reach the inner shrine—the *garbha-griha*. What do we find within? What does the divine voice say? What is that message which brought peace to the heart of Arjuna, and, through him, to the thousands of men and women in India in every age struggling against poverty, disease and early death? Can we too listen to the song and say, like Arjuna at the end, that the scales have fallen from our eyes, that our doubts are past and that we have come to ourselves? We hope we can.

It is well known that the message of the Gita has been variously interpreted. The great Acharyas, who have purified our religious beliefs from time to time, had to interpret it according to the needs of the age in which they lived. They had to emphasise this or that aspect of the teaching, to the neglect of the other aspects.

According to Shankara the Gita is primarily a gospel of jnana ; according to Ramanuja it is a gospel of bhakti ; and according to Tilak it is a gospel of karma. But the Divine Charioteer put no such blinkers to his white horses. He traverses all paths known to man. In his infinite compassion he undertakes to guide the human spirit not only along the highways but even through by-paths and lanes. His appeal is not merely to the will of man or his heart or his intellect. It is to the whole man. He recognises no water-tight compartments in human personality. Therefore we should try to interpret his message not in the light of our learning, not in the light of our preconceived philosophical or political theories, but in the light of our common spiritual experience. If we choose this humble path of discipleship, accepting the Gita as our guide and finding our way through life with its help, we shall see that it is not merely a gospel of jnana, or merely a gospel of bhakti, or merely a gospel of karma. It is rather a Gospel of Godly Life. It is a gospel of fellowship with God. The author of the Gita has a small word of his own for godly life or fellowship with God. It is Yoga. This word is the key to the whole scripture. The Sanskrit word "yoga" and the

English word "yoke" are cognate terms. Yoga is yoking together in fellowship. When a man lives in fellowship with God he is said to be in yoga. This fellowship may be more intense in moments of meditation than at other times. And "yoga" in a restricted sense may be applied to such moments. The Gita uses the word in this restricted sense also. But more often it uses it in the general sense of companionship with God. Half the beauty and significance of the teaching is lost if we understand the term "yoga" in the Gita in a technical way as in Patanjali's system. Therefore it is essential to know the primary meaning of it here as opposed to the secondary meaning of it in the later systems of mental discipline. Its wider connotation is clearly recognised by the traditional concluding formula at the end of each chapter. There the Gita is described as a yoga-shastra or a scripture of godly life and not merely a manual of mental concentration. Similarly the author describes the Avatar as Yogeshvara, that is the Lord of yoga or holy life.

"Through the grace of Vyasa I have listened to the supreme and profound yoga, as Krishna, the Lord of yoga, himself declared it."

(XVIII. 75.)

In the Gita itself yoga is defined variously. It is defined in one place as *samatvam* or equality of mind. In another place it is defined as *karmasu kausalam* or right action. And in a third place it is defined as the rapture of *samādhi*. Right views, right effort and right rapture—do not these terms remind us of the famous Aryan eightfold path in the first sermon of Buddha? The Great Teacher says:

“There are two extremes which a man who has emerged out of himself ought not to follow—on the one hand habitual devotion to the passions and the pleasures of sensual things, which is a low and pagan way, ignoble, unprofitable, and fit only for the worldly-minded; on the other hand habitual devotion to painful self-mortification which is also ignoble and unprofitable. There is a middle path discovered by the Tathagata—a path which opens the eyes and bestows understanding, which leads to peace, to insight, to the higher wisdom and to Nirvana. Verily it is the Aryan eightfold path—consisting of Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Mode of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Rapture.”

Buddha divided path of holy life into eight as he had in his mind the eight gates of an Aryan town. The Gita divides it into Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Dhyana-Yoga, Buddhi-Yoga, etc. The paths are as many or as few as you please. Their goal is the same. It is a higher, an intenser, a richer life which will be our possession when we learn to emerge out of our small, miserable, self-centred life. It is what the Gita comprehensively calls Yoga or godliness.

If, therefore, the Gita is avowedly a scripture of godly life that teaches man to live in fellowship with God, it should appeal to all the powers of his soul. It should appeal to his will, it should appeal to his intellect, and it should appeal to his emotions. The gospel is bound to be as complex as human personality. For guidance is required not only for our actions, reasonings and devotions but also for the thousand problems, doubts and difficulties that confront an earnest soul in its religious life. We repeat it is the greatness of the Gita that it affords such a guidance, treating human life as an indivisible whole. The eighteen chapters of the book have been divided by a commentator into three sections—the first six forming the

gospel of action, the next six forming the gospel of devotion, and the last six forming the gospel of wisdom. But this division is not very satisfactory, as there is a good deal of overlapping, and as action, devotion and wisdom are nowhere entirely separated from each other. No doubt at the end of the first section (Chapter VI, 26-32) we have the description of an ideal Yogi; at the end of the second section (Chapter XII, 13-20) we have the description of an ideal Bhakta; and at the end of the third section (Chapter XVIII, 51-56) we have the description of an ideal Jnani. But even a casual glance at these descriptions will show us that they have many features in common. The fact is that in the Gita karma, bhakti and jnana interpenetrate and form one ideal—the ideal of godly or holy life. The type of man it aims at producing is neither exclusively a man of action, nor a man of devotion, nor a man of contemplation, but a saint in active life. For saintliness is not merely righteousness, or wisdom or love. It includes all these and more. A saint is a man who ever lives in fellowship with God, who views all living creatures as parts of one reality and who incessantly works for their good. Scores of passages could be quoted from the Bhagavad-Gita

to show that it was this ideal which the author had in view. Take for instance these verses.

“He who is happy within, who rejoices within, and who is illumined within—such a Yogi partaking of the nature of God is at peace with God. Those whose sins have declined, whose doubts are removed, whose souls are disciplined, and who are ever engaged in the good of all beings—such Rishis are at peace with God. Those who are free from desire and passion, whose minds are subdued, and who have realised their souls—such sages are ever at peace with God.” (V. 24-26.)

The emphasis is now on one aspect and now on another. But the word Yogi sums up all the aspects of the ideal which the author of the Gita puts before us in a thousand different ways. In one place he eloquently says :—

“The Yogi is greater than the ascetic ; he is greater than the sage ; he is greater than the hero. Therefore be a Yogi, O Arjuna !” (VI. 46.) In other words, the man who leads a saintly life is greater than the man of action or the man of contemplation or the man of renunciation ; for he includes all these. The whole is greater than the part.

VII

It is the greatness of the Gita that among the Hindu scriptures it stands alone in emphasising adequately the life of action. The very context in which it occurs, apart from any specific verses, shows the importance attached by the Teacher to this aspect of life. The great Shankara may belittle work in his writings. But whoever worked harder than Shankara? We know how incessantly he travelled, preached and wrote, how he galvanised the whole of India in a few years, put down heresy, and re-established the Vedantic faith. If active life is required for the full play of the personality of a philosopher like Shankara, how much more necessary is it for ordinary men? The quarrel between those who taught salvation by works and those who taught salvation by knowledge or insight goes back to the Vedic age. When ritualism was developed in all its complexity in the Brahamana period, the reaction soon came in the form of the Upanishadic teaching with an over-emphasis on jnana. But even in the midst of reaction there were teachers who insisted on both jnana and karma. The author of the Isha-Upanishad is an outstanding example of this synthesis. In this short and paradoxical

poem we have the germs of that comprehensive view of life which the author of the Gita worked out in detail and made his own. The Upanishad says :

“ Whatever moving thing there is in the world—all this is enveloped by God. Enjoy it in a spirit of detachment and covet not the wealth of another. Thus never ceasing to act, a man may desire to live a hundred years. It is only then his actions will not cling to him.”

This insistence on active life required greater reiteration in the Epic age on account of the abnormal development of monastic Buddhism. We have already seen how the philosophy of the epics was a reaction from the extreme monasticism of the Buddhist Sangha and how it took its stand on domestic virtues and preached social service. So the Bhagavad-Gita, while insisting on the Vedantic ideal of jnana, is at great pains to say that it does not involve a life of quietism. Nor does karma which it advocates mean mere ritualism. The author is of course too wise to condemn all rituals. He is far from being a puritan or an iconoclast. He knows the value of ritual. He clearly points out its disciplinary nature.

“Sacrifices, gifts and austerities should not be given up, but performed. Sacrifices, gifts and austerities purify the wise.” (XVIII. 5.)

But what he cannot tolerate is the blind complex ritualism of the Vedic literalists. He has little patience with this school of priests. The language he uses in condemning them is startling. It is next in intensity only to that which he uses against free-thinkers and atheists.

“Fools who rejoice in the letter of the Veda make flowery speeches and say ‘There is nothing else but this.’ Their souls are ridden with desire and they long for a Paradise. They ever speak of rebirth which is the reward of rituals, and they lay down many and various rites to those that would enjoy pleasure and power. Therefore those that are attached to pleasure and power are carried away by their words, and have not the resolute will to contemplate on God.

“The Vedas treat of things in the three-fold state of Nature. But you must rise above that state, O Arjuna! Be free from the pairs of contraries, be steadfast in purity, never care for possessions, but possess your soul.

“To a Brahmin, who knows himself, the Vedas are all of as much use as a tank in a place where there is water everywhere.” (II. 42-46.)

“When your mind has escaped from all the snares of error you will not care for what you have learnt or have yet to learn.” (II. 52.)

“When your mind, which is distracted by the Vedic texts, stands unmoved and fixed in contemplation—then will you be in Yoga.” (II. 53.)

Thus in his indignation he goes very near undermining the authority of the Veda itself, though subsequently he makes Bhagavan say in a magnificent passage :—

“I am seated in the hearts of all ; and from me proceed memory and wisdom, and their loss as well. I am the person whom all the Vedas are in search of. I know the Veda and I have made the Vedanta.” (XV. 15.)

The Gita not only condemns blind, ritualistic karma but also, following the method of the Upanishads, gives a wider interpretation to karma and yajna. The Chandogya-Upanishad in a famous passage says, “*Purushôvâva yajnah*,” that is, “The life of man is all a sacrifice.” The Gita, in a similar manner, says that it is only when you have learnt to do all your actions in a spirit of self-sacrifice that you will have true freedom. The sacrifice of material things is nothing compared to the sacrifice of the spirit.

“Some make a sacrifice of their wealth ; others of their spiritual power ; and others still of their yoga. There are again men of austere lives and rigid vows who make a sacrifice of their scholarship and of their jnana.” (IV. 28.)

“Thus various kinds of sacrifice are voiced forth in the Vedas. Know them all to be born of karma, and you will be saved.” (IV. 32.)

“But O Arjuna, the sacrifice of jnana is better than the sacrifice of any material object ; for all karma in its entirety culminates in jnana.” (IV. 33.)

As *yajna*, so also *karma* is given a wider significance. *Karma* includes not only the daily round of ritual but also social and political service. All that we do either for our own good or for the good of others, all our actions from *sharirayâtrâ* or the maintenance of our bodies to *lôkasangraha* or the welfare of society constitute *karma*. In fact *karma* is the faithful discharge of a man's entire *dharma*—his duty to his family, to his country and to humanity. It is a pity that, in spite of the author of the Gita, *karma* remained with us a narrow concept of daily ritual, as, in spite of Buddha, *dharma* remained a narrow concept of caste-duty. If India had clung to the Gita-concept of *karma*, her religion would have been

in healthy contact with practical life and would not have degenerated into Pharisaism. Or, again, if India had the wisdom to work up steadily to the ideal of Buddha, the latter would have proved a solvent to all her political and social troubles, and the Hindus would have been a virile community, and their religion an unifying faith.

In interpreting a man's dharma, the author of the Gita takes his stand, no doubt, on the caste system and insists on every man doing his duty in accordance with its laws. But, according to him, the basis of caste is character and profession, and not birth or wealth. He voices the belief of his age that caste is a divine institution, and that the division of labour implied in it is entirely in accordance with aptitudes. But he immediately qualifies his statement by the sublime admission that every man, however low he may be in the social scale, can obtain salvation by serving God and doing his duty.

"The four castes were created by me according to their aptitudes and professions. I am the author of them, and yet I am actionless and changeless." (IV. 13.)

"The duties of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras are divided, O

Arjuna, according to their natural qualities.”
(XVIII. 41.)

“Man attains perfection by devoting himself to his own duty. Hear how he attains perfection by doing his duty.

“He who is the source of all beings and by whom all this is pervaded—by worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty a man attains perfection.” (XVIII. 45, 46.)

But the originality of the Gita is not so much in the wider connotation of the term *karma* as in the sublimation of the motive that lies behind it. Like all great scriptures it teaches that selfishness is the root of all sin. The enemy of every man is *kâma* or desire which is equivalent to *tanha* in the Buddhist literature. The Gita compares it to an insatiable fire—a figure that reminds one of the famous fire-sermon of Buddha.

“All things, O priests, are on fire. And what, O priests, are all these things which are on fire? The eye is on fire; forms are on fire; the eye-consciousness is on fire; the impressions received by the eye are on fire; and whatever sensation pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent originates in dependence on impressions received by the eye, that also is on fire.

“And with what are these on fire?

“ With the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief and despair are they on fire.

“ Perceiving this, O priests, the learned and noble disciple conceives an aversion for the eye, conceives an aversion for forms, conceives an aversion for eye-consciousness, conceives an aversion for the impressions received by the eyes; and whatever sensation pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent originates in dependence on impressions received by the eye, for that also he conceives an aversion.

“ And in conceiving this aversion he becomes divested of passion, and by the absence of passion he becomes free, and when he is free he becomes aware that he is free; and he knows that rebirth is exhausted, that he has saved the holy life, that he has done what it behoved him to do and that he is no more for this world.”

The seat of kama or desire is the senses, mind, and will. So long as a man acts for the satisfaction of these he has not found his true self. It is a delusion to think that these which constitute our individuality constitute our real self. Our

real self is the self of all beings. Beyond our senses, beyond our mind, and beyond our individual will is the true Self which is the centre of right action. How to reach this? How to get at this centre and act from it, so that our actions may be free from the taint of kama or selfishness? The process is twofold. It is both negative and positive. The first consists in restraining our senses, mind and will. This can be done only by slow degrees. By constant practice one can gradually gain mastery over one's false self. Restraint is the beginning of religious life. So long as our pleasures are unbridled we have not "entered on the paths". Buddhism hopes to make the course easy by preaching that the self, which is the usual motive for our actions, does not really exist. This pragmatic truth has unfortunately been hardened into the doctrine of Anatta or No-Soul and made a permanent barrier between Hinduism and Buddhism.

Buddhism confines itself to the negative side of spiritual life and eloquently preaches the uprooting of all desire, since it is the source of *duhkha* or unhappiness. It prescribes a rigorous mental and moral discipline to its followers. So far the Gita travels in company with Buddhism. It also insists on our subduing our

senses, restraining our minds, and cultivating an indifference to cold and heat, pleasure and pain. This process is called 'yoga' in the narrow sense of the word. But the Gita does not stop there. If it did, its teaching would not be different from that of Buddhism or Stoicism. It goes further and develops the positive aspect much more fully and adequately than Buddhism does. In fact it clearly says that, without the positive side the negative discipline is unmeaning and even harmful. Fierce penances when they are not accompanied by a loving faith in God are only acts of self-torture. The Gita, while insisting on discipline, wisely discourages all excesses, and proceeds to describe the love of God which should take the place of low desire. The Divine Grace is after all the light that should dispel the darkness of the mind. We may sweep and garnish our hearts, but until the Divine Visitant takes possession of them they are but empty chambers. We may remove the selfish motive behind our actions, but unless we replace it with a nobler motive we shall paralyse all action. The Gita sees the danger and gives the warning.

"Work alone is your concern and not its fruits.

So never desire the fruit of your work ; *nor desist from work.*" (II. 47.)

Therefore from the very outset it pays attention to both aspects of the question. It teaches a man not only to surrender the fruits of his actions but also to act from an exalted motive.

“Do your work in fellowship with God, and be free from attachments, O Arjuna. Never lose your balance in success or failure. Balance of mind is Yoga.” (II. 48.)

“He, who works in fellowship with God and is free from attachments, is untouched by sin, as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.” (V. 10.)

“He who is in fellowship with God gives up the fruit of his action and attains peace that remains unshaken; while he who has no such fellowship is led by desire and longs for the fruit, and hence he is bound.” (V. 12.)

The Gita repeats this double formula—of eradicating desire and living in God—in a thousand different ways, as though to avoid misunderstanding. Therefore to say that it teaches merely the doctrine of *nishkāma karma* or desireless action, in place of *naishkarmya* or no-work taught by the Sankhyas and Vedantins is only to express a half-truth. Such a statement ignores the all-important fact that *yoga* takes the place of *kāma* as a motive for action. It leads to the common error of supposing that the Gita is a cold, stoic gospel preaching duty for

duty's sake. It leads also to a misapprehension that it is a gospel of asceticism which may be good enough for men of advanced age but quite unfit for young students on the threshold of life. Well, asceticism is no bad ideal especially in these days of indiscipline and indulgence. It is an indispensable element of Hindu culture. India loves an ascetic. All our great men have been ascetics—Yajnavalkya, Buddha, Mahavira, Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vidyanaraya, Madhusudana, Dayananda, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda—not to speak of the living. The whole Hindu scheme of life is a preparation for Sanyasa. Every true Hindu has a longing for that larger life, that god-like state which is the crown of our earthly career. That a Hindu student should be scared away by an ascetic ideal is a true measure of his fall. True asceticism means manliness, and the lack of it effeminacy. But the Gita does not teach mere asceticism. Its discipline does not culminate in a negative Nirvana. On the other hand it leads to what the author describes as Brahma-Nirvana or life in God.

VIII

Thus in the Gita righteousness is vitally connected with spiritual life. It is the blossom

of the spirit which is at peace with God. Karma is rooted in bhakti. It is performed by one who is not only *nishkâma* but also *yôgastha*. It is not simply a motiveless action, but an action that proceeds from a divine motive ; for it is not the human will that lies behind it, and it is not the human mind that is to be satisfied by it. These have been surrendered to the Divine will and the Divine mind. The little well of the human mind is filled with great waters. The human personality is taken possession of by the Personality that pervades the whole universe. The Gita wants us to surrender not only the fruit of action but also the agency of action. This can be done only through bhakti or devotion.

The bhakti that is taught in the Gita is derived from two sources. It is derived, on the one hand, from the *upâsanâs* taught in the Upanishads, and, on the other, from the *prapatti* taught in the Bhagavata School of theism. Upasana means meditation. In what aspects should God be meditated upon ? The Upanishads describe both the personal and impersonal aspects. There are, first, those aspects of God which we, men, can understand. They are qualities which we can appreciate, for they are also present in us—in the best of us, in however

infinitesimal a condition. We can picture to our minds an Ishvara with all the glorious virtues known to man, multiplied a million-fold. We can think of Him as an ocean of love, pity, forgiveness, goodness, purity, righteousness, etc. But we cannot avoid the suspicion that it is all a human creation and that our conception of God is only a projection of the human personality. It is sometimes vulgarly said that everywhere man makes God in his own image. The great founders of religion are not unaware of this difficulty. They know that man cannot fully apprehend God. They know that there must be certain aspects of Him, of which nothing can be predicated by us. In fact anything that we can predicate of Him is tainted by the weakness of the human mind. Therefore Christian theology speaks of God the Father, the unknown quantity, and of God the son, the known. Buddha observed a masterly silence on the whole question. The Blessed One apparently thought that it was enough for the common man, to whom his teaching was addressed, to know that there is misery in the world, that there is a cause for it and that there is a way to remove it. Yajna-
valkya in a well-known passage, speaking of Atman says "Neti, neti." Not this, not that is He.

It is a unique feature of Hinduism that, unlike other religions, it adequately emphasises the impersonal side of God and denotes it by the neuter pronoun 'Tat'; while at the same time it represents the personal side of God impartially now as a Father and now as a Mother. The Gita combines the personal and the impersonal in its new concept of Purushottama. It believes that the impersonal is as much a false abstraction as the personal. The reality is a synthesis of both.

"There are two Beings in this world—the transient and the eternal. The transient is in all created things; and the eternal is the uncreated. But there is another Being superior to these. He is the Lord who pervades and sustains the three worlds, and who is also immutable. As I am superior to both the transient and the eternal, I am declared Purushottama in the world and in the Veda."

(XV. 16-18)

The Gita clearly says that meditation on the unmanifested, impersonal and unqualified God is difficult for men.

"The difficulty of those whose minds are set on the unmanifested is greater; for the path of the unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach."

(XII. 5)

Therefore for purposes of worship the personal Ishvara is preferred and, to render Him more concrete for the imagination, He is identified with the Avatar. At the same time the worship of the lesser deities is not condemned. With a wide toleration, which is both the strength and the weakness of Hinduism, the author says that the worship of all deities is only a worship of Ishvara. But, while tolerating and even encouraging the lower faiths for men who cannot transcend them, he points the way to a larger and purer worship for those who can follow him.

"Those whose minds are overpowered with this or that desire resort to various ceremonies, according to their own natures, and devote themselves to other gods. Whatever form a devotee seeks to worship with faith—I confirm him in that faith. Strengthened in the faith he worships it and gains what he desires; and it is I that sanction it. But finite indeed is the result achieved by these men of small minds. Those who worship the gods go to the gods; those who worship me come to me. And even me, the unmanifested, the ignorant regard as having manifestation. These do not know my supreme nature—the immutable and transcendental."

(VII. 20-24.)

Thus the God of the Bhagavad-Gita is not a jealous God. He recognises all forms of worship, provided they make men better. Every man is at liberty to have his own Ishta-devata. But no man should have a static conception of God. He should pray for more and more light. And, with the increase of his knowledge, his spiritual values should change. To stand still is death. It is true that all forms of worship are imperfect. But we should strive to make our form less and less imperfect. We should not take refuge in the following well-known verse and sit quiet:—

“Howsoever men approach me even so do I accept them; for on all sides whatever path they may choose leads to me, O Arjuna.”
(IV. 11.)

All paths, no doubt, lead to God. But it is better for us to get on to the high road. The great composer Tyagaraja has a hymn which begins with the words “When there is the straight highway of the king, O mind, why dost thou seek by-paths and lanes?” The author of the Gita is as clear on this point as he is on toleration.

“Even those devotees who worship the other gods with faith—they worship me alone, O Arjuna, but by the wrong method. I am indeed the Lord and the enjoyer of all sacrifices; but,

because they do not know me in truth, they fall." (IX. 23, 24.)

The Gita not only pleads for a progressive bhakti, but also suggests ways and means. It even marks off the stages of the journey and indicates the goal.

"Fix your mind on me alone; let your thoughts rest in me. And in me shall you live hereafter. There is no doubt. If you are unable to fix your mind firmly on me, then seek to reach me, O Arjuna, by constantly withdrawing it from other things. If you are unable to practise even this, then work for my sake; even by working for my sake you can reach perfection. If you are unable to do even this, give up the fruit of all action and seek refuge in me with your self controlled."

(XII. 8-11.)

In other words, self-control, unselfish work, service of the Lord, constant meditation and fellowship with God are the successive steps in the path of religious life. The goal is reached when man constantly lives in God. But one should not make too much of such cut-and-dried schemes of salvation. Religious life is too large and complex to be subjected to any unalterable regulations, which are their own epitaph. Theologians wrangle over these like angry

cows, while common people look up to them like calves for the milk of spiritual life. The author of the Gita, when he is prescribing both for the discipline of the heart and the discipline of the mind, does not go beyond a few simple rules. And even these are dissolved at the end in the grand, culminating sentence in which Bhagavan says :

“Renounce every rule of life and come to me alone for shelter. Do not grieve, for I will release you from all sins.” (XVIII. 66.)

The consciousness of sin on the part of man and the idea of redemption through Divine Grace are characteristic of the Bhagavata School of theism, which is one of the sources of inspiration for the author of the Gita. Some scholars have hastily assumed that the passages in the poem which show great consideration and tenderness to sinners were due to Christian influence. But, apart from all questions of chronology, these ideas are found so inextricably blended with the characteristically Hindu doctrines of karma and rebirth and the four castes that it is almost critical perversity to say that they are imported from abroad. Take for instance the following verses :

“Even if the most wicked man worship me with an undivided devotion he should be

regarded as good, for he has resolved rightly. He will soon become righteous and gain everlasting peace. O Arjuna, know for certain that my devotee will never perish. Those who take refuge in me, O Arjuna, though they are of inferior birth—women, Vaishyas and Shudras—reach the highest state.” (IX. 30-32.)

“ Having reached the worlds of the righteous and having dwelt there for unnumbered years, he who has fallen from yoga is born in a pure and prosperous house.” (VI. 41.)

It is only those who are ignorant of our bhakti literature that attribute to the influence of Christianity the ideas of Divine Grace and Divine Love as well as the sense of human imperfection and helplessness and the longing for a personal saviour.

It is to be observed that the bhakti described in the Gita, while satisfying the needs of the human heart, is free from the excessive emotionalism of the later Bhagavatas. The Bhagavata purana of the ninth century set the standard of a new kind of bhakti which has powerfully impressed the religious imagination of India. The result is seen in innumerable songs, stories, dramas and domestic pictures which have as their subject Krishna, the child, or Krishna, the lover. The rationalists who

condemn these in unqualified terms ignore the intense religious feeling and the poetic view of life that lie behind. With Krishna and the Gopees we enter a realm of pastoral romance, where for a moment our moral shibboleths have to be laid aside. The adventures of Krishna would be objectionable if they were historical. But they are not historical. They have a higher truth than that of history. They have the ideal truth of poetry. For they indicate the unfolding of the heart of Love. Nor are they allegorical, as some would have us believe. They are of pure romance with a background of religious feeling. They introduce us to a strange land of love and music. We escape, as it were, from life and its little laws at the call of the Divine Charmer. His voice still comes to us, as it once came to the milkmaids on the banks of the Jumna one summer night, when they left their homes and husbands and went to listen to His flute. Therefore, in spite of the puritan, Krishna remains the Beloved of India. The austere Bhagavan of the Gita is all but forgotten. To the popular mind Krishna is only the eternal child or the winsome youth who steals the hearts of men. It is difficult, perhaps, for a foreigner to understand the Hindu feeling for Krishna. It is not

only emotional mothers and voluptuous lovers that take delight in his stories, but also old men who have led spotless lives and retired from the world. Madhusudana Sarasvati, the author of the *Advaitasiddhi*—the toughest work on Advaita philosophy—says in a feeling verse, after establishing the formlessness of God, that he knows no higher reality than Krishna the beautiful, lotus-eyed, red-lipped flute-player. The present writer remembers to have seen in an ancient and historical mutt a mural painting in which an austere-looking Sanyasin is reverently placing flowers at the feet of a youthful Krishna decked with the usual ornaments and peacock feathers. So it is not a question of reason, but of sentiment and immemorial associations. However, the bhakti which the Gita inculcates is not the lax emotion of the Bhagavata purana. It does not throw the worshipper into a frenzy of feeling. It does not make him transgress the conventions of society. On the other hand, the ideal bhakta described in the twelfth chapter is a very austere person, suspicious of sentiment, and fortified against love and hate. He is a man of balanced mind deriving inspiration for his actions from a healthy communion with God.

The communion with God or, to use the author's favourite word, Yoga, not only gives the impetus for right action but also purifies the understanding and enlarges the vision. Bhakti and karma together culminate in jnana. And jnana or spiritual vision reacts on bhakti and karma. We cannot too often repeat that these are inseparable. They are the three aspects of a single reality. They are the indivisible elements of the compound of godly life. The proportions in which they combine in each individual may vary and thus constitute personality. But no sound religious life is possible without all the three. Mere righteousness or mere devotion or mere spiritual insight is neither possible nor desirable. The younger religions of the world fight shy of jnana. They prefer the milk diet. But India, the mother of religions, is no baby. Her religious tradition goes much farther back than what the western writers call the wisdom of the ancients. She trafficked on equal terms with the ancient Greeks, as she does to-day with the modern Christians. She has been able to do this, because she neglected no aspect of spiritual life. But for her incurable political weakness and her

strange inability to live up to her own ideals, she would have been the first moral power in the world, instead of being, alas ! the last. India never shirked hard metaphysical thinking. In fact some of her schools have taught that that was the only way to salvation. But the Gita is not a one-sided gospel. The very fact that different schools of religious thought have claimed it as their particular gospel shows it is many-sided. Its teaching is as comprehensive as life.

What does the Gita mean exactly by jnana ? The word is often translated as knowledge. But jnana is not mere knowledge, for which there is another word—vijñana. The difference between jnana, vijñana and ajñana is clearly given in the Gita. (XVIII. 20-22.) That knowledge which clings to each object as if it were the whole reality is—ajñana. That knowledge which regards all beings as separate from each other is—vijñana. And that knowledge which sees the unity of all life is—jnana. The latter is the highest kind of knowledge.

Unity of all life and the immanence of God are the metaphysical concepts that lie behind the Hindu ethics even in its most recent developments. For Mahatma Gandhi says :—

"I believe in *advaita*, I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him; and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent." *Young India* (4-12-'24).

"What though we have many bodies but one soul? The rays of the sun are many through reflection, but they have the same source. I cannot therefore detach myself from the wickedest soul. Nor may I be denied the identity with the most virtuous." *Young India* (25-9-'24).

The Hindu sages contemplate nothing less than the opening up of a new realm of consciousness through the ethical and religious discipline they prescribe. Their attempt is similar to adding a new dimension to space. Mathematicians theorise about the four-dimensioned space and speculate on the forms which the geometrical figures take in it. In like manner the Upanishadic seers speak of a consciousness beyond the human consciousness. It is called God-consciousness, or transcendental or cosmic or unitary consciousness. It is as different from human consciousness as the latter is different from animal consciousness. If we compare a man's inner life with that of an

animal—a dog or a cat—what a world of difference do we perceive! What hopes, fears and aspirations! What complex emotions and great thoughts! What designs for the future, what regrets for the past, and what capacities for present enjoyment! What possibilities of science, art and religion! These are blessings denied to the animal. Suppose by means of some magic we are able to generate human consciousness for an hour in a dog. We can imagine how the poor creature would emerge into a wonderful world of light and colour, of new shapes and forms, of strange feelings and thoughts. We can imagine how it would be almost bewildered by the experience. And after that one hour of bliss, when the magic has ceased to operate, if the animal reverts to its original canine consciousness but remembers the experience it had, what a painful contrast it would feel! Would it care very much for the meat we throw to it? Would it take pleasure in the company of other dogs as before? Would it not be disgusted with the conditions of dog-life and long for release? That is exactly the feeling of those who have travelled beyond the human consciousness and had a taste of jnana. The reports they give us of that superhuman state are wonderful to read.

They tell us that they see the whole universe of things and creatures and also of powers and intelligences as one indivisible Being. And the most remarkable feature of it is that the spectator is a part of the pageant. He not only sees it but also is It. The Upanishads are full of passages which try to describe this state. Their eloquence is lost upon us, as we have no notion of what they mean. The words—Brahma, Atma, Jnana, Tat, etc.—with which we glibly play were originally terms of tremendous import. They were syllables that compressed within themselves a world of meaning. They were symbols of a unique experience, the sign-posts of a divine vision. The author of the Gita tries to describe this vision in his famous eleventh chapter. Arjuna is given a new sense called the *divya-chakshus* and, for a moment, taken beyond the human consciousness. He sees the Visva-rupa or the Universal form with its unimaginable wonders. The poet tells us that, if the splendour of a thousand suns were to rise up at once in the sky, that would be like the splendour of that mighty Being. Arjuna saw the whole universe resting together with its manifold divisions in the body of that God of gods—the awful Dispenser of Life and Death.

The point to be observed in jnana or divine consciousness is that human consciousness is not thereby obliterated any more than animal consciousness is obliterated by human consciousness. In being men we do not cease to be animals. So in becoming angels we shall not cease to be men. In both cases the consciousness is only extended and made to see things veiled before from its view. And ultimately the God-consciousness includes and transcends all grades of consciousness. That is the meaning of the Upanishadic sentence, " Verily, all this is God ". The extension of human consciousness in jnana should not, however, be confused with the merely abnormal psychic powers of clairvoyance and clairsaidence which some people possess. The difference between God-consciousness and clairvoyance is as great as between a Christ and a miracle-monger.

It is not claimed, of course, that the mystic experience called jnana is the exclusive possession of the Indian sages. There have been mystics in all countries and in all ages. But they stood, as it were, outside the ecclesiastical tradition of their lands. In India, on the other hand, they formed a definite school at the head of the church. Their experience was fully mapped out. Its errors were checked and its

dangers guarded against. The knowledge was no doubt confined to a few, as it could not but be. But the whole Hindu scheme of life is designed for the ultimate possession of this royal secret. Hinduism says to its followers what Krishna says to Arjuna :—

“I will now declare to you, as you are willing to listen, the most profound jnana which includes all knowledge. If you know it, you will be freed from evil. It is the highest of sciences, the most profound of secrets and the greatest of sanctities. It is eternal and accords with the law. It is easy to achieve and it is realised through direct experience.” (IX. 1, 2.)

The author of the Gita is of opinion that those who have gained this jnana and reached Brahma-nirvana, in which the soul is purified and the sense of duality is lost, are still intent on the welfare of all beings. Work is no doubt optional for them. But they love to work. For does not God work? And can man be ever greater than God? Krishna says:

“I have no duties, O Arjuna. Nor is there anything in the three worlds which I have to gain or which I have not gained. And yet I continue to work.” (III. 22.)

If the unity of all life is granted, how can there be real peace to any man till all are

saved? So in his overflowing love the jnani becomes a Bodhisattva, deferring his own salvation and offering his virtues for the redemption of the world. He becomes a pillar of light. He works in the midst of a sinful world and remains untouched. For he lives in the bosom of God and carries out His will.

X

God is Truth. His will is the eternal Law. All is well with us as long as we conform to it. But how to find out Truth? How to distinguish it from Error? In a difficult crisis how are we sure that our choice is right, that we are carrying out the will of God and that we are the instruments of Divine Justice? Our duties are not always clear. The difficulty that confronted Arjuna confronts all of us. It may not be on the same scale. But, even in our humble spheres, if we are anxious to do what is right we are often puzzled. And in such circumstances what light does the Gita throw on our path? That is the question of questions for us. For we want to make the Gita the staff of our lives. It is not a scripture that we should read at the end of our careers but at the beginning. Its lessons have to be applied to life at every

step and their validity tested in our own spirits. The Gita was meant to be a practical gospel and not a philosophical treatise.

The answer which the Teacher gives to our question is incredibly simple. Krishna says :

“The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them all to revolve as though mounted on a machine. Take refuge in Him, Arjuna, with all your heart. By His grace you will obtain supreme peace and the everlasting abode.” (XVIII. 61-62.)

“To those that are devoted to me and worship me in love do I give the steady mind by which they come to me. Out of compassion for them do I dwell in their hearts and dispel the darkness born of ignorance by the shining lamp of wisdom.” (X. 10-11.)

In other words, we are bidden to lead a holy life, to make ourselves pure and perfect receptacles of God and pray to Him in all earnestness and humility to enlighten our conscience. But this is not done in a moment. In a difficult crisis we cannot suddenly shut our eyes and listen to the voice of God. We shall only hear the voice of our own weakness and sin. Our whole life should be a preparation for the task. We should cultivate the habit of meditation and prayer. We should every day retire

into the depths of our spirit and review our actions with God as our witness. Imperfect as our conscience is, how often do we fall short of its standards! How often do we perform actions which our better nature, unenlightened as it is, tells us it is not right to do! How often do we hug our delusion and our sin! But if we have the courage to follow the gleam of light that is given to us, it will grow by degrees till it becomes the broad light of day. The only way to enlighten our conscience is to follow it faithfully and to pray for a clearer vision.

But even supposing that we have made ourselves as pure as we could and prostrated in the dust before God and prayed to Him for light and guidance, can we be sure that we have eliminated error? Can any one guarantee that we are in possession of Truth? No. On the other hand it often happens that what appears as incontestable truth to us appears as falsehood to others. If we have the humility to think that others are as much entitled to Truth as we are, being the children of the same Father, we must pause before we triumphantly act on our conscience, especially when our action involves injury to others. What havoc is caused in the world sometimes by men who sincerely think that what they do is right! Ardent churchmen

in the middle ages in Europe sincerely thought that they were serving the Church by burning the heretics. Brutus sincerely thought that in the interests of Rome Cæsar should be killed. Othello sincerely thought that Desdemona was sinful and deserved death. In that famous scene in which Othello looks upon himself as the instrument of Divine Justice we have a double tragedy. We have first the tragedy of a man having to sacrifice the dearest love of his heart in administering justice. But more poignant than that is the tragedy of a man doing incalculable harm to himself and the innocent woman whom he loved most tenderly under the erroneous impression that he was administering justice. Othello may not be the type of the religious man we have postulated above. In his case it may even be admitted that it is the animal feeling of jealousy that masquerades as Divine Justice. But even the most religious man in the world cannot claim immunity from error for the simple reason that he is a man. Perfect ourselves as we may, error will cling to us as long as we are in the flesh. So what is the way out of the difficulty? The Gita simply says, "Lead a godly life, eliminate every trace of the self, pray for light and act according to the

dictates of God within." But when a number of people sincerely submit themselves to the same process and find themselves ranged on opposite sides what are they to do? And where is Truth? Both sides claim it, as in the late war. In such circumstances, is there any other alternative but to fight it out and kill one another? The recent developments in the Hindu ethical thought come to our rescue here. The message of the Gita has been extended by Mahatma Gandhi. If it is admitted that error could only be due to the traces of self still left even in the most perfect man, the only thing to do is to find out a way of eliminating the self still further. When a man sincerely comes to the conclusion that he is in possession of Truth, he should try to establish it not by force but by self-suffering. It is only when he is prepared not to kill but be killed for his truth that he can be said to leave every vestige of self behind. He should be able to say like Arjuna, though in a different sense and from a different motive:—

"If the sons of Dhritarashtra, weapon in hand, should slay me, unresisting and unarmed, in the battle, that would be better for me." (I. 46.)

His identification with Truth becomes then complete. If what he stood for is Truth, his

martyrdom will melt the hearts of men and establish it firmly. If it is falsehood or error, no harm is done to the world. Only the misguided man harms himself and leaves the world. Hence truth becomes Truth only through self-suffering. What is man to arrogate to himself the monopoly of Truth and to force it on others? Let him suffer for it. Let him die for it and demonstrate to the world its power so that others may be convinced and accept it out of their own free-will. This discovery is of momentous consequence, for it effects a transvaluation of our moral values. It means that to be killed is more heroic than to kill. It is nobler to stand up in spotless innocence against our misguided brother and be slain by him than to march against him and slay him. It is more profitable to convert him through love than put an end to him through violence. It is better we evoke the divinity in him by our suffering and work a permanent cure of the evil than crush him, win a temporary triumph, and perpetuate the evil. In a word, Truth is secure only when it sits on the throne of Love. Eternal Truth postulates Immeasurable Love.

Therefore let us learn that the path of duty is also the path of love. Duty for duty's sake

is a cold and ineffectual ideal. It is a mistake to think that the Gita teaches it. Duty for Love's sake or God's sake is the ideal taught by that Scripture. The Yogi described there is a man who joyfully carries out the will of Ishvara because he loves Him and sees all things in Him.

It is not enough that we love God in an abstract way. We should love Him in the hearts of all men. The Gita bids us love Him in the outcast who eats carrion as well as in the scholarly Brahmin. So, while acting according to the highest lights within us, we should be as tender and gentle as possible to others, but severe and exacting to ourselves. In a crisis when there is a doubt as to the right path and when it is not clear to us on which side lies the Truth, we have to choose that path or that side which involves the greatest suffering to ourselves and the least suffering to others. We are usually very inconsiderate to others and very considerate to ourselves. The reversal of this order is the first step in spiritual life. Once we take that step, our way becomes clear and easy. Love, which is the positive aspect of Ahimsa, is the light which should lighten our way to Truth.

The comprehensive nature of the teaching of the Gita can be fully understood only when we know its relation to the various schools of thought that flourished in India at the time. The author is evidently a teacher of the widest toleration. But he has no patience with atheists, materialists and free-thinkers. He denounces them all in scathing terms (see Chapter XVI) and condemns their specious arguments and misguided actions. We do not exactly know what schools are included in his condemnation. There is no doubt that those who came to be known as Laukayatikas or Charvakas are the principal offenders. It has been suggested that Buddhists and Jains are also included in his description. But it is only those whose doctrines result in wicked deeds that seem to call forth the wrath of the teacher. The line of toleration that he draws is the lowest possible. He shuts out from grace only those men of "asuric" nature who have in them "neither purity, nor good conduct, nor truth".

It has already been shown how the teaching of the Gita transcends that of the Vedic school of pure ritualism, which is called Karma-Mimamsa. The God of the Gita is not only a

Yajñeshvara but also a Yogeshvara. Sacrifices are acceptable to Him, but they should be the sacrifices of the spirit. Offerings are pleasing to Him, but they should proceed from a devout heart. Heaven is the reward He gives to the religious soul, but it is a heaven here and now. It is the kingdom of God within us, entering which, as the Upanishad says, "a blind man is no longer blinded, a wounded man is no longer wounded, and a suffering man is no longer suffering." Thus we have progress from an external and mechanical religion to an internal and spiritual religion. But the older phase is not entirely discarded. The Hindu mind is too wise and tolerant to break away abruptly from the past, or to prescribe the same forms of worship for all. It recognises that for the immature soul religion has to be rather external and mechanical.

"The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the dull men whose knowledge is imperfect." (III. 29.)

The Gita equally transcends the Vedantic school of absolute quietism. Its main source of inspiration is the Upanishads. In fact a well-known verse in the Gita-dhyanam compares the Upanishads to cows, the Gita to milk, and Krishna to the milkman. The Gita is

therefore the essence of the Upanishads. It is the layman's Upanishad, as the Mahabharata is the layman's Veda. The Upanishads were originally taught as a secret doctrine to those who were men of approved character and spirituality. Therefore there was no need to emphasise the first two aspects of spiritual life—karma and bhakti. But in the Epic age when the religion of the Upanishads was popularised, karma and bhakti had to be as clearly expounded as jnana. For the same reason a personal Ishvara had to be substituted for the unconditioned Absolute of the Upanishads. Thus the Gita has done an invaluable service to India, and also to the world, by making the teaching of the Upanishads more effective, and their appeal more universal.

The relation of the Gita to the Bhagavata religion has also been pointed out. Its emphasis on bhakti is derived from the worshippers of Vasudeva. The doctrine of *prapatti*, according to which a man has to surrender himself absolutely to God and pray for His forgiveness and grace, was originally a Bhagavata doctrine. It is expressed in various places in the Gita, but especially in the final *mahavakya* which has already been quoted.¹ The emphasis on the personal

¹ P. 69.

aspects of God, which makes the Gita a theistic scripture and not a philosophical theory, is also due to the Bhagavata religion. In fact some critics are of opinion that the nucleus of the Gita was a Bhagavata manual, and that it gradually grew into a Yoga-sastra. Whatever that may be, there is no doubt that a warm current of love and devotion to a personal God flows from the Bhagavata school into the Gita.

The relation of the Gita to the Samkhya and Yoga systems is now a well-worn theme. We cannot go into all the details of it as they are rather technical. But, in the first place, it should not be forgotten that, at the time of the Gita, Samkhya and Yoga were no rounded systems of thought. Their doctrines were still in a rather fluid state, and the terms they used had not hardened into technical terms. Many ideas and expressions were common to the Samkhya, Yoga, Bauddha, and Vedanta schools. So it is uncritical to read into the language of the Gita the clear-cut doctrines of the later philosophical systems. However, it cannot be denied that the author was as much fascinated by the speculations of Kapila, the reputed founder of Samkhya, as by the revelations of the Upanishads. He included Kapila among the *vibhutis* or manifestations of God. And he tried, if possible, to

work the speculations of that great thinker also into the grand synthesis of the Gita.

Every religious teacher has to make use of the scientific knowledge of his time. His teaching is inevitably coloured by the current scientific theories as well as by the current social beliefs. The Upanishads are full of cosmological theories which often contradict each other. The Christian Gospels have references to the medical beliefs of the time. Christ was not above his age in believing that epilepsy was due to an evil spirit. A preacher during the middle ages in Europe cannot but express his belief in Ptolemaic astronomy and the theory of humours. A philosopher in the nineteenth century has to base his system on the theory of evolution. The philosopher of to-day makes use of the theory of relativity and the electrical theory of matter. Thus scientific knowledge grows from age to age and it inevitably colours the religious philosophy.

It is bigotry to insist on faith in the scientific theories of a former age, simply because they happen to be mentioned in scriptures. And it is misplaced ingenuity to read modern meanings into outworn systems. Nothing is gained by such interpretations, and meanwhile a positive disservice is rendered to religion. If

an ignorant priest expresses his belief in the mythical geography of the Puranas he makes a laughing-stock of himself. The case of a student who puts faith in the cosmology of the Rig-Veda and tries to read modern scientific theories into it is worse. It should be frankly admitted that belief in a particular scientific theory or a particular social order is the perishable part of a scripture. It belongs to the husk that covers the living seed. Had it not been for the accident of its being associated with the spiritual truth, it would probably have been forgotten long ago. So in reading a scripture we should take care to estimate its scientific beliefs at their true worth. In understanding the genius of a religious teacher we have to ask ourselves, not whether he was in advance of the scientific knowledge of his time, but whether he had the courage to discard the old scientific beliefs that had come to him along with his religious tradition and to accept the nascent theories of his own time. For, while the former test is a manifestly unjust one, the latter shows a virile mind swiftly moving with the times and eager for progress. And if the teacher not only accepts the new theory but also eliminates from it the obviously erroneous elements, his greatness is established beyond a

doubt. Such a teacher was the author of the Gita. He is a jnani of the Upanishadic tradition. But he discards its cosmological theories and accepts the new psychology and the new cosmology of the Samkhyas. He not only accepts the Samkhya theory, but also corrects its atheistic tendencies, and overcomes its dualism.

According to the Samkhya system there are two ultimate realities in the world—Prakriti and Purusha. The phenomenal world that we see around us is a Vikriti or a series of changes which Prakriti constantly undergoes. Purusha or rather Purushas differ from Prakriti in not being subject to any change. They are unchanging witnesses of the changing Prakriti. Prakriti is ever active. It is the sole agent of all change. It has three gunas—Satva, Rajas, and Tamas. It is unconscious in itself, but its activities have a purpose. The first product of the contact of Prakriti with Purusha is *mahat* or *buddhi*. Out of this arises *ahamkāra* or self-consciousness. Then come the five *tanmātras*—form, taste, smell, sound, and touch. These are both subjective and objective. Then comes *manas*, then the five *jñanendriyas*—the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the skin; then the *karmendriyas*—voice, hands, feet and

the excretary and the generative organs ; and finally the five *mahābhūtas*—the earth, water, light, air and ether. Thus we have twenty-five *tattvas* or categories in all. These constitute the world which is really an illusion produced on the Purushas by Prakriti. As long as the illusion lasts the Purushas are bound to Prakriti. They delude themselves into thinking that they are acting, while it is Prakriti that is really acting. Joy, sorrow, sin, merit, birth, death and release—all properly belong to Prakriti and not to Purusha. Purusha remains untouched by these, but he fancies himself subject to all the changes. He is affected by them only in the way in which a colourless glass is affected by a red object beside it. The glass appears red, but is not really red. The illusion wrought on Purusha by Prakriti can be destroyed only by the knowledge of his own real nature on the part of the Purusha. When the Purusha obtains the true knowledge, he reaches *kaivalya* or the state of isolation from Prakriti, which is his liberation. He then becomes a *nistraigunya* or a *trigunātīta*—that is, one free from the thralldom of the three qualities of Prakriti. Thus salvation can be got only through true knowledge, and not through works. For works mean a greater

contact of Purusha with Prakriti; and that results in a heavier bondage and a deeper illusion. There is no reference to God at all in this system—neither as a creator nor as a saviour. Hence it is termed an atheistic system.

Let us now see how the author of the Gita works some of the doctrines of the Samkhyas into his synthesis. He accepts the concept of Prakriti with its three gunas and the evolution of the twenty-four tattvas. He admits that our individual actions are to be attributed to the forces of Prakriti—that is, to the objective element in man. He admits that the Purusha is deluded in thinking that he by himself is the doer. He also admits that the liberated soul is free from this delusion and knows its true nature and transcends the three gunas of Prakriti. The following verses show the Samkhyan proclivities of the Gita :—

“ Know that Prakriti and Purusha are both without a beginning; and know also that changes and qualities are all born of Prakriti. Prakriti is said to be the cause of the production of the body and the senses; Purusha is said to be the cause of the experience of pleasure and pain. Purusha, seated in Prakriti, experiences the qualities born of Prakriti; but attachment to

those qualities is the cause of his birth in good or evil wombs." (XIII. 20-22.)

"All actions are performed by the qualities of Prakriti. Man thinks 'I am the doer,' because he is deluded by his self-consciousness." (III. 27.)

"When a man transcends the three qualities out of which his body is evolved, he is freed from birth, death, old age and sorrow, and becomes immortal." (XIV. 20.)

But the Gita alters the trend of the whole Samkhya thought by its conception of the one Purusha, of whom the other purushas are only partial manifestations. And this Parama Purusha or Purushottama is not only a witness but also a governor. Prakriti is His Prakriti. Its purposive changes are directed by His Will. He is the Antaryamin—the God immanent in all creation as well as Paramatman extending beyond it. Prakriti is His lower manifestation. The Jivas are His higher manifestation. As Prakriti is thus an aspect of God, contact with it is *not* evil. On the other hand it is only by working in conjunction with it to carry out the purpose of God implied in creation that the individual can transcend his individuality. Further, the liberated Purusha is not merely free from the thralldom of Prakriti and its gunas. He is in conscious union with God.

“ At the end of a cycle, O Arjuna, all beings go back into *my* Prakriti ; and at the beginning of a cycle I send them forth again.” (IX. 7.)

“ The Supreme Purusha in this body is styled the witness, the authority, the supporter, the enjoyer, the great Lord and even the Supreme Self.” (XIII, 23.)

“ And he, who serves me with an unswerving life of devotion, passes beyond the gunas and is fit to become one with Brahman ; for I am the abode of Brahman, the eternal and the immutable, and of the everlasting law and unending bliss.” (XIV. 26, 27.)

Thus at every stage the atheistic and passivistic dualism of the Samkhya system is overcome. The author has simply made use of the Samkhya analysis of the world and of the human mind in his popularisation of the Upanishadic teaching, as a Christian preacher to-day might use the terms of psycho-analysis in bringing home to his congregation the mysteries of Christianity. It may be that the Samkhya analysis is now superceded, and its account of evolution must give place to more scientific theories. But that does not invalidate the teaching of the Gita any more than the supersession of psycho-analysis a few years or generations hence would invalidate the teaching of

Christ. Meanwhile, those who regard the scientific theories pressed into service by the author of the Gita as true for all time and as being part and parcel of the teaching do an incalculable disservice to the great scripture.

The relation of the Gita to Patanjali's Yoga is similar to its relation to Kapila's Samkhya. In fact there is no essential difference between the Samkhya and Yoga systems except that the latter prescribes a detailed *sâdhana* for *kai-valya* and makes a faint mention of Ishvara. Therefore Yoga is sometimes called *Seshvara Samkhya* or Theistic Samkhya. But Ishvara is only an incident in this system, and not an essential element. Patanjali accepts the dualism of Kapila and believes in the theory of the evolution of the world from the apparent contact of Purusha and Prakriti, and prescribes a severely graded discipline of the mind for reaching *samâdhi*. The various stages of this process are *yama* or abstinence, *niyama* or control, *âsana* or posture, *prânâyâma* or regulated breathing, *pratyâhâra* or withdrawing of the mind, *dhâraṇa* or attention, *dhyâna* or meditation and *samâdhi* or rapture. The whole process is called Yoga. And the latter is defined as *chitta vritti nirôdha* or the stopping of the mental movements. As these movements are

the results of the action of Prakriti on Purusha, they have to be restrained, so that Purusha may become independent of Prakriti. When samadhi is obtained, Purusha transcends the gunas and is free. But samadhi may also be obtained by devotion to an Ishvara. And who is Ishvara? Ishvara is defined as only a *Purusha-vishesha* or a particular Purusha who is untouched by the actions, results and imperfections of the world. He stands outside the other Purushas and Prakriti. He is not immanent in creation, nor is he the creator. The evolution of the world does not depend upon him. Nor is the liberation of souls directly brought about by him. And salvation does not mean union with him. He is only the model of a liberated Purusha. By devotion to him, however, the other Purushas can become like him. For he is the first teacher of Yoga in whom omniscience lies in germ.

This short account of the system will show how far it is from the Gita. First of all, the Gita uses the word Yoga in a much larger and varied sense. It uses the term sometimes to denote karma, distinguishing it from the term samkhya, which often merely denotes jnana. It uses it also in the sense of mental concentration. Again it uses it in the sense of power, well-being, and synthesis. But above all, as has

already been shown, it uses it in the sense of godly or holy life or companionship with God. It is mainly in Chapter VI that the author of the Gita uses the word Yoga in the sense in which Patanjali uses it. Here and elsewhere he makes mention of some of the eight *yogângas*, but not at all in a systematic manner. He takes particular care that the regulations prescribed are not harsh. Arjuna rightly refers to the yoga described to him as characterised by *sâmya* or evenness. It does not run to excess. It advocates moderation in eating and sleeping, and not severe fasts and vigils. It advises no difficult postures nor prolonged breathing exercises. It insists only on the right vision, namely, seeing all things as parts of one reality—God.

“A man, who, established in unity, worships me dwelling in all beings—that Yogi lives in me, *whatever his mode of life.*” (VI. 31.)

The author of the Gita is as much opposed as Buddha to severe ascetic practices. Asceticism is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end. So there is a false *tapas* as well as a true *tapas*. The Gita distinguishes the two in the following verses:

“Those men who practise severe *tapas*, not enjoined by the scriptures, full of vanity and

pride, possessed by desires and passions, senseless, and torturing all the organs of the body and me also seated within—know them to be of wicked resolves.” (XVII. 5, 6.)

“Worship of the gods, the priests, the teachers and the wise; purity, straightforwardness, abstinence and non-violence—constitute the *tapas* of the body. Words which cause no vexation and which are truthful and pleasant and good; and the regular study of the scriptures—constitute the *tapas* of speech. Serenity and kindness, silence, self-control and purity of motive—constitute the *tapas* of the mind. This threefold *tapas* practised by devout men, full of faith and without desire for recompense, is said to be the highest.” (XVII. 14-17.)

Again, there is no comparison between the conception of God which we have in the Gita, and that which we have in the Yoga system. According to the Gita, God is both transcendent and immanent. He is present everywhere in creation and extends beyond it. He determines all its activity. He helps all souls with His kindly presence. He is a redeemer within call. At the same time He is the Impersonal “That” of which nothing can be predicated by us. In a word, the *Purushottama* of the Gita and the *Purushavishesha* of the Yoga system are poles

asunder. It is interesting to notice, however, that both of them are *Yogeshvaras* or teachers of Yoga. Only the Yoga of the one is a mere channel of mental discipline, while the Yoga of the other is an ocean of saintly life.

The relation of the Gita to Buddhism is not so explicit as its relation to the other schools of thought we have considered. But it is none the less important. Buddha taught the importance of morality. His gospel was one of ethical idealism. He widened the concept of dharma. His dharma was of universal application. It was not confined to the four walls of a caste system, as the Hindu dharma was. Though the Gita also teaches the importance of the life of righteous action, it is conservative, as we have seen, in its interpretation of dharma. But in all other respects it leaves Buddhism far behind. Early Buddhism ignored the religious consciousness of man and therefore failed to substitute a higher motive for conduct in place of *tanha* or desire which it sought to eradicate. In Buddha's scheme of life there was no room for the love of God. Therefore it became only an ascetic code of morals. Nor did Buddhism invest the goal of ethical life with any positive character. Nirvana was always described in negative terms. It was often interpreted as mere extinction. It

was not made clear that what was meant was the extinction of the limited consciousness only. Consequently, a desire for Nirvana was no satisfactory parallel to the jnana or bhakti of the rival system as a motive for conduct. So it happened that the Gita took the wind out of the sails of Buddhism. In its final form it practically absorbed and transcended the gospel of Buddha. And, as it did not turn its back on tradition and did no violence to the caste-feeling, it established itself firmly in India, while Buddhism had ultimately to leave the land of its birth.

In the Mahayana Buddhism, that followed in the footsteps of the Hindu revival, Buddha himself was exalted to the rank of the Supreme Deity, and devotion to him supplied a long-felt need. One of the Mahayana scriptures—the Saddharmapundarika or the Lotus of the True Law—is said to be a close parallel to the Bhagavad-Gita. It is interesting to observe that in this book we have a singular confirmation of the synthetic view we have taken of the teaching of the Gita. For there the Tathagata clearly tells Shariputra that there is only one vehicle—the Buddha-vehicle—for teaching creatures the law. There is no second or third. But, says He, “Have I not told thee before,

Shariputra, that the Tathagata preaches the law by able devices, varying directions and indications, fundamental ideas, interpretations, with due regard to the different dispositions and inclination of creatures whose temperaments are so various?" For the sake of convenience, as explained in the parable of the burning house, the one Buddha-vehicle is made to appear threefold—the vehicle of the Disciples, the vehicle of the Pratyekabuddhas and the vehicle of the Bodhisattvas. The first is for those "who, wishing to follow the dictate of an authoritative voice, apply themselves to the commandment of the Tathagata to acquire the knowledge of the four great truths, *for the sake of their own complete nirvana.*" This corresponds to Bhakti-yoga. The second is for those "who, desirous of the science without a master, of self-restraint and tranquillity, apply themselves to the commandment of the Tathagata to learn to understand causes and effects, *for the sake of their own complete nirvana.*" This corresponds to Jnana-yoga. The third is for those "who desirous of the knowledge of the all-knowing, the knowledge of Buddha, the knowledge of the self-born one, the science without a master, apply themselves to the commandment

of the Tathagata to learn to understand the knowledge, powers, and freedom from hesitation of the Tathagata, for the sake of the common weal and happiness, out of compassion to the world, for the benefit, weal, and the happiness of the world at large, both gods and men, *for the sake of the complete nirvana of all beings.*" This corresponds to Karma-Yoga.

Thus both the Gita and the Pundarika are agreed in looking upon religious life as a single path, though it may have different aspects according to different temperaments. Again, both the Gita and the Pundarika are agreed in exalting the ideal of a saint in active life, who works for the salvation of all beings. The Gita calls such a man a Yogi; and the Pundarika calls him a Bodhisattva. It is well known that this ideal is developed with marvellous beauty and tenderness in the later Mahayana works. According to one sutra¹ a Bodhisattva says "I take upon myself the sorrows of all beings. I have resolved to undertake them, I bear them, I do not turn away from them, I do not fly from them, I do not tremble, I do not quake, I fear not, I do not retrace my steps backwards, I do not despair. And why so? It is imperative that I assume the burden of all beings. I have

¹ Vajradhvasutra.

no inclination for pleasures, for I have made a vow to save all creatures . . . I have not thought merely of my own emancipation, for I must save all creatures by means of the ferry, of the resolve for omniscience, from the flood of Samsara. I have made up my mind to abide for interminable myriads of æons on the spots of torture. And why so? Because it is better that I alone should suffer than that all these creatures should sink into the state of torment. I deliver myself up as a pledge." And, according to another text,¹ the faith that lies behind a Bodhisattva's career of beneficial work is expressed in these words. "I must destroy the sorrow of the stranger because it pains like one's own grief; I must therefore do good to others, because they are beings like myself. Just as a man loves his hands and feet because they are his members, so also all living beings have the right of affection inasmuch as they are all members of the same world of animate creation." Or, again, according to another text² the Bodhisattva asks himself "When to myself, just as well as to others, fear and pain are disagreeable, then what difference is there between myself and others that I should

¹ Bodhicharyavatara.

² Siksahasamuchchaya.

preserve this self and not others?" Thus the unity of all life is one of the corner stones of ethics according to the Mahayana as well as the Gita.

XII

From the preceding section it will be seen that the Gita is a river with many tributaries. It is like the Ganges. Many a tributary joins it in its course from the Mimamsa, Vedanta, Bhagavata, Samkhya, Yoga, and Bauddha regions. But the main stream comes from the Himalayan heights of the Upanishads. Lower down the river, if we taste the water, we cannot say from what tributary it comes. The waters mix perfectly and it is all one stream. Modern scholarship, with its microscopic methods, has no doubt discovered a few inconsistencies here and there. But they are only in details which are of no significance. Likewise modern criticism, with its fastidious tastes, may say there are some priestly inanities in the later chapters. But even the conventional formulas employed there are transfigured by the pure white light of idealism that plays on every page of the scripture. There is no doubt, therefore, that once in the history of Indian thought a grand

synthesis was achieved. All schools were united and from a common platform went forth an appeal for Yoga or a saintly life of purity, insight and love. It was addressed to all the Indian peoples—rich and poor, high and low. It was addressed to the student and the householder, to the anchorite and the man of the world. The Gita called upon all, without distinction of varna or ashrama, to lead a holy life, to seek refuge in the spirit, to look upon all creatures as parts of one reality, and to perceive, behind the claims of every duty, the stern voice of God. Such a call cannot be for a particular age or a particular country. It is for all times and for all men.

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